THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' USE OF SOCIAL

MEDIA AND HOW IT RELATES TO THEIR PERCEIVED HAPPINESS: A

PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by William Robert Longwell

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Liberty University

Graduation Year

2024

THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' USE OF SOCIAL

MEDIA AND HOW IT RELATES TO THEIR PERCEIVED HAPPINESS: A

PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by William Robert Longwell

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

2024

APPROVED BY:

Vonda Beavers, Ed.D., Committee Chair

Christopher Clark, Ed.D., Committee Member

Abstract

The problem in this study is that undergraduate students' use of social media may influence their perceived happiness. The aim of this transcendental phenomenological study is to understand undergraduate students' lived experiences with social media and how it is related to their perceived happiness. The theory guiding this study is Festinger's theory of social comparison. Participants perceived happiness was explored based on their lived experiences of using social media and how it related to their perceived happiness. Data collection methods included journal prompts, individual interviews, and focus groups, as these methods proved the most useful in this qualitative study for the outlined research questions. The study also consisted of 10 participants who were separated into two focus groups. The data were then analyzed by hand coding, along with inputting the data through NVivo to identify and organize identified and like themes. I identified themes of thematic analysis, the themes of the Purpose Behind Social Media Use, Impacts of Social Media Use, and Unintentional Outcomes. The use of epoché, phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation during the data analysis process was used to limit biases from being present during the analysis. The central research question for this study is: How do undergraduate students describe their lived experiences with social media as it relates to their perceived happiness? The findings of the study identified the relationship between social media use and the perceived happiness of undergraduate students, which was seen through the type of content viewed and the time spent on social media by the participants.

Keywords: Social media, social comparison, life satisfaction, well-being, and happiness.

Copyright Page

Dedication

I dedicate this study to all those who have been my continued support throughout my journey. God first and foremost for continuing to give me the strength, mentality, courage, and drive to continue with my work during every trial and tribulation. Next, I dedicate this work to my family who have been beside me each and every step of the way. All the late nights missed family outings, and struggling times, you have all been my driving force to power through the work. Lastly, I dedicate my work to everyone who dares to say they cannot reach a goal. I am proof that with the right mentality and drive anyone can achieve what they put their minds to.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge my chair and committee members as they have been a continued influence and helping hand throughout my journey. I would also like to acknowledge my peers, professors, and editor, who have helped mold me, my work, and my knowledge base since the beginning.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Abbreviations

Qualitative Data Analysis (QDAS)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Auxier and Anderson (2021) conducted a study that found that roughly 40% of participants stated they use Instagram, another one-in-three use Pinterest, and about a quarter of the participants utilize Snapchat. The use of social media has continued to grow since its inception, leading to increased needed research (Leung, 2019). The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to understand how undergraduate students describe their experiences with social media and how it related to their perceived happiness. While there continues to be abundant research on social media, information that directly relates to the lived experiences of undergraduate students' use of social media relating to their perceived happiness needs to be included. Chapter one presents the background, situation of self, problem statement, purpose statement, the significance of the study, research questions, and definitions.

Background

Marengo et al., (2021) pointed out that individuals use social media platforms daily to post unique content with their friends, families, and strangers. Grau et al., (2019) noted that internet addiction is broadly recognized and has raised much attention but has yet to be fully defined. Social media use could be problematic, such as relying on false information without proper fact-checking beforehand (Viviani & Pasi, 2017). Social media use has been shown to affect users' moods but not their self-esteem (Berry et al., 2018). Studies revolving around social media use are exponential; however, studies designed around undergraduate students use of social media and its relation to their perceived happiness remain slim.

Many students see that social media distracts from their academic duties during their courses as they scroll through their devices rather than listen to lectures or study for their

coursework. Distractions could mean students would spend more time checking their platforms, posting content, or commenting on others' content instead of studying or completing school assignments on time (Rosen, 2017). According to Alt (2018), recent studies correlated negative findings between social media use and the well-being of students. These negative findings, which related to the student's well-being, could be caused by distractions or lack of performance within the classroom due to their overuse of social media. Social media use can distract many undergraduate students, lowering classroom performance (Zachos et al., 2018). The effects of social media use for undergraduate students could relate to their perceived happiness as areas of concern, such as school performance, distractions, well-being, and others are questioned.

Historical Context

According to Balakrishnan and Gan (2016), students and instructors have recently begun implementing social media use, such as Facebook, in their role of education for increased communication and learning capabilities. Siddiqui and Singh (2016) pointed out that since social media was developed, there has been an increase in both positive and negative effects of social media use in education, such as increased communication or damage to social interactions amongst students. The use of social media tended to show mixed reviews, as undergraduates and faculty tried to balance the positives and negatives of social media use in and out of the classroom (Smith, 2016). Smith discussed how many students view the use of social media in formal education as a potential benefit with increases in communication and interactions between students and faculty.

Since social media's first inception with Myspace in 2003 (Brake, 2016), its use in education has continued to evolve. Manca and Ranieri (2016) pointed out that social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, are mainly used in education to increase motivation in

their students. The use of social media in education continues to evolve as it becomes implemented further (Manca & Ranieri, 2016). The growth of social media use by undergraduates may lead to potential concerns with how it could relate to their perceived happiness.

Social media use could lead to depression among social media users or even lead to ways in which users cope with depression (Radovic et al., 2017). The growth in social media use since its inception leads to further curiosity about its phenomenon. Addictions, lower self-esteem, depression, and mental health problems have increased due to continued social media implementation for undergraduates and educators alike (Berryman et al., 2018). Avom and Malah (2022) pointed out how social media has developed into a source of misinformation, cybercrime, and victimization. The development of social media has proven positive in many circumstances. However, there remains identified negatives from its use, as highlighted above.

Social Context

Social media has expanded to roughly one-third of the world's population, as of 2016 (Hawi & Samaha, 2017). Since its inception, it may be relatively easy to visualize social media's relation to society as we almost constantly see individuals on their cell phones to promote connectedness and togetherness (Sapacz et al., 2016). Allred and Atkin (2020) identified that roughly 80% of the American population in 2016 either had their own cellular device or had experience using a cellular device. While many social media users explore these platforms through their cellular devices, their use also shows a direct link to envy, leading to lower well-being (Meier & Johnson, 2022).

Auxier and Anderson (2021) conducted a study that noted that 81% of the participants used Facebook, while 69% of the participants surveyed used YouTube. Siddiqui and Singh

(2016) discussed the positive and negative correlations to social media use in education, such as negatively reaching out to other students or believing false information that could lead a student astray from positive academic growth. Manca and Ranieri (2016) noted that positive social media use influences teaching and learning, such as increased student information sharing. Latif et al. (2021) showed that social comparison through social media use could lead to negative and positive behavioral consequences, such as switching intention and self-enhancement for the social media user.

According to Hawi and Smaha (2017), technological addictions, such as the internet and social media sites, had positive associations with social media users' stress, anxiety, and depression, while highlighting negative associations with academic performances, which could all relate to their life satisfaction. While social media use and happiness continue to be studied, the need for further research into the relation of social media use on undergraduate students' perceived happiness remains to provide further theoretical context in current literature.

Theoretical Context

The theoretical concept used for this study was the social comparison theory, developed by Leon Festinger in 1954. Festinger (1954) described social comparison theory as how individuals view themselves through outside images or sources in which to compare themselves. Aspects of social comparison later evolved to include upward and downward comparison, which directly correlates to Festinger's original theory (Mollee & Klein, 2016). Social media use ties directly into social comparison as users compare themselves in either an upward or downward trend (Cheng et al., 2021). Students could select what content they viewed through the theory of uses and gratification to feel confident and control what gratification they receive from its use (Katz et al., 1973).

Transactional media effect theory describes how certain types of media an individual selected could bring about a transaction, such as a change in the social media user, which could influence the reason behind the media use (Nesi et al., 2022). Undergraduates could use social media to follow the transactional media effect theory to obtain some semblance of perceived happiness in support of the social comparison theory. According to a study by Zhang et al. (2022), social media use through devices leads to increased stress hormones, while sedentary behavior suppresses the release of happiness secretions. Avom and Malah (2022) noted from their global study that the correlation between social media use and happiness varies according to the perceived happiness of the social media user. Through continued research, this study narrows the focus of social media and perceived happiness to that of undergraduate students. The use of social comparison may shed new light on how social media use could relate to the perceived happiness of undergraduate students.

Problem Statement

The problem in this study was that undergraduate students' use of social media may influence their perceived happiness. Marengo et al. (2021) pointed out how social media users show signs of happiness as they post, message, and share content on social media platforms. At the same time, Berryman et al. (2018) presented that using social media leads to mental health concerns in its users, such as depression and anxiety. Berezan et al. (2018) shared how individuals' definitions of happiness change as they age and traverse different paths in life. The ambiguity of defining happiness strives toward a broader issue of undergraduate's experience of social media and how it could influence their perceived happiness.

The study focused on undergraduate students over the age of 18 to help narrow the information to a specific group to understand this phenomenon from through their perspective.

Due to social comparison, some individuals utilizing social media could have lower happiness levels (Chae, 2018). Valkenburg (2022) noted that the passive use of social media could lead to lower well-being in its users. Academic performance could be influenced negatively based on social media multi-tasking by undergraduate students (Abbas et al., 2019). At the same time, there is a noticeable positive and negative influence on students' vocabularies who use Instagram (Putri, 2022). The study provided a better understanding of the effects social media has on undergraduate students' perceived happiness in hopes of providing ways for them to understand and cope with its potential consequences.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand how undergraduate students described their experiences with social media and how it related to their perceived happiness. The study drew participants from Facebook over the age of 18 who reside within the United States and who were presently enrolled in undergraduate coursework. At this point of the study, social media is generally defined as Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, Twitter, and TikTok.

Significance of the Study

The significance of the study revolved around multiple points of interest, such as the theoretical, practical, and empirical importance. The study's theoretical significance was the foundation for understanding the discussed phenomena of how social media use could relate to undergraduate students' perceived happiness. The theoretical significance of a study is the foundation of the research from where all knowledge stems (Osanloo & Grant, 2016). The practical significance of this study was focused on how understanding this phenomenon could benefit social media users, educators, and institutions. Lastly, the empirical significance of this

study was on the research gap to further understand undergraduate students' experiences using social media and how it relates to their perceived happiness.

Theoretical

The theoretical significance of this study will revolve around Leon Festinger's theory of social comparison (Festinger, 1954). For many individuals worldwide, the use of social media has become almost a way of life, as described by Auxier and Anderson's (2016) study, which showed that roughly 89% of participants used YouTube and 61% used Facebook. As Festinger (1954) described as the theoretical foundation for this study, the social comparison could lead to increased motivation to accomplish a goal or lower self-esteem, which could relate to an individual's perceived happiness (Cheng et al., 2021). Social comparison relates directly to how individuals interact with social media, such as commenting on posts, liking posts, or through their passive use, such as simply browsing content (Yang & Robinson, 2018).

Practical Significance

According to McCay-Peet and Quan-Haase (2017), social media studies could answer many methodological and ethical questions, including queries relating to social media. Depression and anxiety, as negative factors of social media use (Seabrook et al., 2016), could connect directly to the perceived happiness in undergraduate students who use social media regularly. The practical significance of this study highlighted the need for continued research within the realm of social media, social comparison, and how it could relate to the perceived happiness of undergraduate students. Avom and Malah's (2022) study focused on social media and happiness from a global perspective. Avom and Malah's study also showed that happiness in social media users varied widely based on their perception of their happiness. When studied from a larger perspective, the phenomenon of social media use and happiness could muddy the

findings, while narrowing the focus could provide unique findings that prove beneficial to certain groups. Regularly using social media platforms, such as Facebook, showed an increased correlation with a social media user's happiness, self-esteem, and well-being (Marengo et al., 2021). Through this continued narrowed research, students, educators, universities, and more may benefit from further understanding the phenomenon highlighted throughout this study.

Empirical Significance

Studies on specific aspects of social media use, such as its influence on mental health, loneliness, and physical health, have previously been researched (Berryman et al., 2018 & Dibb, 2019). According to Berryman et al. (2018), it was clear that links between social media use and mental health stemmed more from how social media users spent their time on these platforms, as opposed to simply spending time on social media alone. Studies have also been conducted on social comparison and its relation to social media platforms, leading to potential depression and anxiety issues (Cheng et al., 2021). Behavioral aspects, such as self-enhancement, envy, and other emotional factors (Latif et al., 2021), showed how social media use could relate to the perceived happiness in undergraduates. This study may address the gaps in the literature, focusing specifically on how undergraduates' use of social media links to their perceived happiness.

<div align="center">

Research Questions

</div>

The central research question below, followed by the two sub-questions, may hopefully answer the prompt of the study. Understanding the relationship between social media use and undergraduate students' perceived happiness could provide vital insight into the phenomenon of social media. This understanding could better equip universities, faculty, and users to handle social media use and its potential positives and negatives.

Central Research Question

How do undergraduate students describe their lived experiences with social media as it relates to their perceived happiness?

Thomas et al. (2020) identified the difficulties undergraduate students might face when establishing new social connections and how the inability to do so can influence their academic and mental success. Understanding undergraduate students' lived experiences of social media use and how it relates to their perceived happiness may give students, researchers, educators, and universities a more in-depth perspective.

Sub-Question One

How do undergraduate students describe their lived experiences with social comparison as it relates to their perceived happiness?

Sub-question one aims to allow undergraduate students to describe their lived experiences with social comparison and how it relates to their perceived happiness. Mandishekwa (2021) provided several examples of what constitutes happiness, such as a nation's wealth, genuine wealth, or well-being in modern times. While this study cannot provide a clear-cut definition of happiness, it may provide a viewpoint into each undergraduate's personal experiences of social comparison relating to their perceived happiness. By allowing the participants to describe how social comparison related to their perceived happiness, a connection may be made on how it correlates to social media use.

Sub-Question Two

How do undergraduate students describe their lived experiences with social comparison as it relates to their social media use?

The phenomenon of social media use is still being studied and may continue to be examined for many years. Understanding individual and group social media experiences and their relation to Festinger's social comparison theory (1954) may provide vital research information to understand this phenomenon further. Research into social media is an emerging field in such studies as social media experiences with suicide prevention (Robinson et al., 2016). The question aims to understand better the shared and individual participant experiences regarding the social comparison of social media use. The study may hopefully provide correlations between the two and how it intertwines with the perceived happiness in social media users.

Definitions

1. *Happiness* – A positive emotion depicting pleasure or enjoyment (Oishi & Gilbert, 2016).

2. *Life Satisfaction* – Is regarded as the cognitive component of subjective well-being and involves a global evaluation of the quality of one's life (Antaramian, 2017).

3. *Social Comparison* – Unable to self-judge our opinions and abilities accurately and, instead, rely on comparing ourselves to other people to form an evaluation (Festinger, 1954).

4. *Social Media* – Mobile or web-based browsing to support communication (Power, 2014).

5. *Well-being* – A standing in which the individual views their life as positive (Diener et al., 2018).

Summary

The problem in this study is undergraduate students' use of social media relating to their perceived happiness. Social comparison, as introduced through social media use, shows the relation to depression, lower well-being, and life satisfaction in social media users (Valkenburg,

2022). Chae (2018) pointed out that the continued use of social media leads to social comparison and envy in long-term uses. The relationship between social media use and the perceived level of happiness is highlighted through social comparison, a factor that could lead to depression, comparison, and envy. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to understand how undergraduate students describe their experiences with social media and how those experiences relate to their perceived happiness.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to understand how undergraduate students describe their experiences with social media and how it related to their perceived happiness. Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory is used to further this study. This theory is further addressed in this chapter, the theoretical framework. In the second section of this chapter, the related literature is discussed to explore the importance of social media use and its relation to perceived happiness in undergraduate students. This section presents evidence to highlight the literature gap, explicitly focusing on undergraduates' use of social media relating to their perceived happiness. Other research components within this chapter focuses on vital aspects to further understand the phenomenon of the study, such as defining social media and happiness, discussing social media in education, social media's relation to social comparison, and social media relating to health factors. The research is supported by linking social media use through social comparison and how it directly related to the perceived happiness of undergraduate students.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework provides the foundation to link undergraduates' use of social media and its relation to their perceived happiness. Festinger's social comparison theory (1954) shows a direct link to social media use in its users through potential psychological consequences, such as depression (Latif et al., 2021). The theory and other related literature may provide various solutions to better understand the relationship between social media use and perceived happiness in undergraduate students.

Social Comparison Theory

Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory focused on how everyone has an instinctive need to compare themselves to those around them. The social comparison theory was developed in the 1950s when the Ford Foundation funded Festinger to integrate findings about social groups (Wheeler & Suls, 2020). Festinger's theory later showed linkages with social media platforms, as women compared themselves with others they viewed on social media (Tiggermann et al., 2018). Festinger's theory of social comparison (1954) provided the foundation for understanding the phenomenon of social media use and how it related to the perceived happiness of undergraduate students.

Since its inception, the social comparison theory has evolved significantly. Festinger's original thesis on social comparison revolved around objective information for individuals to better compare themselves. Social comparisons original definition became vague as time progressed, and technology became a significant social role through social media. Latif et al. (2021) pointed out how social comparison tends to lead individuals to compare themselves to the opinions and abilities of others. However, others have since then theorized and expanded on this concept. Bruunk and Gibbons (2007) described expanding this idea, including three other images: preference assessment, belief assessment, and preference prediction. Festinger's social comparison theory would continue to evolve into having other supports to this theory, such as upward and downward comparisons.

Upward comparison focuses on how individuals respond defensively when confronted by an individual who outperforms them, such as in sports, which would increase motivation through upward comparison (Diel et al., 2021). Upward comparison could be a motivator that drives a team to push themselves more complicatedly than before. Li (2019) pointed out how envy and

self-efficacy could act as mediators for individuals experiencing upward social comparison. Downward comparison describes how threats to an individual promote their need to compare themselves downward to regain their self-esteem, as highlighted by Gerber et al. (2018). Downward comparison could lead individuals experiencing this adaptation of social comparison to look down on themselves and, in turn, lower their perceived happiness. Diel et al. (2021) pointed out that downward comparison could lead to lower performance levels but increases in happiness as they view themselves as better than those around them.

Lewallen and Behm-Morawitz (2016) and Tiggermann et al. (2018) identified how females compare themselves to the images of others on social media platforms, which could lead them to pursue actions to achieve these ideal imageries. Other concepts of social comparisons, such as upward comparison, have been linked to social media use and identified as potentially problematic, as described by Meier and Johnson (2022). Not all concepts of social comparison develop into a negative standpoint, as there are some positive correlations of social comparison while using social media, such as benign envy amongst users.

It has been seen how social media use mimics traditional media sources' (Zhuravskaya et al., 2020). The theory of social comparison ideally reflects through the lens of social media, as it begins to show how it relates to individuals on many levels, such as its influences. Identity distress is "severe subjective distress regarding the inability to reconcile aspects of the self into a relatively coherent and acceptable sense of self" (Yang et al., 2018, p. 93). Identity distress identifies how the use of social media could influence its users through social comparison and, in turn, relate to their perceived happiness. Social comparison could lead to two types of envy, gentle and negative, in social media users. Based on these two types of envy, social media users could move towards self-improvement or negative gossiping.

Individuals using social media may compare themselves to other users on those established platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, as described by Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory (Tiggermann et al., 2018; Lewallen & Behm-Morawitz, 2016). This comparison is a social dilemma social platform users face because, for many, they could potentially be seeking further validation from others or for a place to belong (Kim et al., 2016). A study by Tiggemann and Anderberg (2020) showed a direct correlation between Instagram users and social comparison through women comparing themselves to a woman's *ideal* image. Due to this, many college undergraduates may want to fit in as much as possible by establishing new connections with others on and off campus. Rozgoniuk et al. (2019) pointed out how Facebook use can increase involvement in extra-curricular activities. In a virtual society, the extra-curricular process is completed more on social media than in person to facilitate these newer relationships, as discussed above. The social comparison theory helped guide this study and show how social media use could relate to undergraduate students' perceived happiness.

The evolution of Festinger's social comparison theory is clear, as time has progressed significantly since its initial development with the growth of social media. The need to consider these factors is undoubtedly evident, as they pertain to today's day and age, with social media rampant worldwide. According to Buunk and Gibbons (2007), a potential positive to downward comparison is how it has been shown to make individuals feel better about themselves. When an individual views themselves as being better than someone around them, they could inevitably be downward comparing themselves to that person, increasing their happiness (Diel et al., 2021). The theory alone does not solidify all research on the phenomenon of social media, as it continues to evolve and, in turn, requires further research to understand how undergraduates' use of social media relates to their perceived happiness.

Related Literature

The related literature section discusses the importance of understanding the link between social media use and perceived happiness. Concepts, such as social media, happiness, social media in education, potential health factors, and others, are discussed through current research. These concepts are then synthesized to provide further connections between recent research as it relates to the topic of the study. The research highlights key points in current research and the need for further research into the described phenomenon to fill current literature gaps.

Social Media Defined

According to Achner et al. (2021), the term *social media* was first used in 1994 by an online Tokyo media environment. Wolf et al. (2018), as well as McCay-Peet and Quan-Haase (2017) defined *social media* as a website for profile creation and visibility of relationships between people. Carr and Hayes (2015) pointed out that the definition of *social media* could be rather convoluted, as most would agree on what tools they consider social media, such as Facebook or Instagram. However, they find it difficult to define fully. In contrast, social media's scholarly and theoretical definitions must be more specific. Power (2014) defined *social media* as an online tool that promotes communication between people. There tends to be a consensus on social media aspects but not a fully established definition. Pittman and Reich (2016) defined *social media* as a platform for users to create and share content with others.

Social media are platforms for users to exchange words electronically, sharing content (Cawsey & Rowley, 2016). Carr and Hayes (2015) pointed out that strangers could be asked what social media is, and they would immediately describe Facebook or Twitter. While there tends to be similar concepts in which social media can be defined, many argue about a true definition. At the same time, many understand social media to revolve around platforms, such as

Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, or YouTube. Anderson and Jiang (2018) stated that about 50% of teens between 13 and 17 use Facebook.

A study by Lau (2017) noted that students' social media usage aged 18-29 increased from 12% in 2005 to 90% in 2015. These studies identified a clear decisive line in the growth of social media use throughout all ages since it was first developed, especially within the age range of many undergraduate students. According to a study by Auxier and Anderson (2021), 81% of identified participants use Facebook. "Even as other platforms do not nearly match the overall reach of YouTube or Facebook, some sites, or apps, most notably Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok, have an especially strong following among young adults. Most 18- to 29-year-olds use Instagram (71%) or Snapchat (65%). In contrast, roughly half say the same for TikTok" (Auxier & Anderson, 2021, Pg. 4). According to Raut and Patil (2016), social media has become built on the central idea of how individuals interact with one another almost daily. Wolf et al. (2018) defined *social media* as a platform to build explicit and traverse relationships. Research showed that these platforms allow connections to be made and maintained by social media users.

Happiness Relating to Social Media Use

Many current opinions make it difficult to measure happiness academically, as it has changed over time in psychological science, according to Uchida and Oishi (2016). Many undergraduate students flock to social media, where the perception of happiness still exists (Avom & Malah, 2022). Berezen et al. (2018) described how social media can transform or reinforce life experiences, such as happiness or self-satisfaction. Some additional factors to measure perceived happiness in individuals include material and life satisfaction, well-being, emotional regulation, and personality, according to Uchida and Oishi (2016). These factors are

generalized concepts in which undergraduate students' perceived happiness could be used as measurement tools.

The use of social media, such as Facebook, could be what drives or relates to the perceived happiness of undergraduate students (Avom & Malah, 2022). This, in turn, could be shown to connect to the perceived happiness of undergraduate students. According to Chae (2018), social media platforms (as identified in Chae's study) indirectly affect happiness levels within the social comparison spectrum, showing links to individuals' happiness. This is due to previous studies indicating how social media can bring happiness and unhappiness equally (Siddiqui & Singh, 2016). Studies have shown that social media leads to negative feelings, such as envy, which could also relate to the user's perceived happiness (De Vries et al., 2018).

When describing social support, social media immediately comes to mind for many, as this has become a fundamental way individuals seek out many kinds of support (Haslam et al., 2017). Chae (2018) described active use of social media, such as producing messages to build social capital or connectedness with one another. For many individuals, this little act could increase their perceived happiness as they develop and build new relationships in the environment, they now find themselves (Demetriou et al., 2017). It becomes necessary for undergraduate students to begin exploring different social groups or expanding their current ones by building new relationships.

Happiness Defined

Defining the term *happiness* makes its understanding much more complex and difficult to truly establish through scholarly sources (Mandishekwa, 2021). Phillips et al. (2017) described *happiness* as being sensitive to individual moral values. The concept of what makes individuals happy is a phenomenon that makes it easier to measure with the proper guidelines thoroughly.

Kim (2020) highlighted multiple factors, which could establish an individual's happiness, such as income, autonomy, economic equality, social support, and generosity. The issue is not necessarily that it is impossible to define *happiness*, but more so, it is difficult to establish a singular definition for this feeling; however, it may determine the concept of happiness as an overall *good life* (Michalos & Michalos, 2017). Moreover, the issue in defining *happiness* lies in the fact that it is such a complex emotion with too many potential variables to determine one singular definition that could apply to every individual.

Oishi and Gilbert (2016) discussed happiness as it fluctuates between cultures, such as Americans defining *happiness* as a positive emotion depicting pleasure or enjoyment. However, concepts and variables linked to happiness include life satisfaction and well-being (Tov, 2018), which would differ for everyone. A happy person would be someone who has established a sense of competency, balanced autonomy with high-quality relationships, experiences opportunities for personal growth, accepts themselves for whom they are, and enjoys feeling engaged in meaningful goals (Biswas-Diener & Wise, 2018). Marengo et al. (2021) noted the positive connection between social media and happiness, including increases in social media users' self-esteem.

Aspects, such as life satisfaction, self-esteem, and well-being, have been used to measure and define *happiness* in a person (Tov, 2018). Mandishekwa (2021) stated that happiness is a short-term phenomenon due to its continuous change for everyone experiencing it. As these studies have shown, there is no agreed-upon definition of *happiness*, and it has been left to strict scrutiny among scholars, as research has shown. Mandishekwa (2021) pointed out that many authors have preferred not to define *happiness* but to use specific indicators to help identify

happiness or well-being in individuals. One such way would be to measure an individual's life satisfaction and well-being to determine their happiness by perceiving current life factors.

Social Media and Well-Being

In most situations, the concept of well-being is subjective and too broad, as there are certain aspects in which the idea of well-being becomes different for everyone (Tov, 2018). Concepts of well-being, such as social standing, success, failures, or current and past relationships, could contribute to the overall level of one's well-being (Cooke et al., 2016). Diener et al., (2018) defined *well-being* as related to an extraordinary life to how the individual views their life. The use of social media over an extended amount of time could be a factor in which the well-being of individuals could be affected—indicating higher or lower levels of perceived happiness through the individual's success or failures in social interactions while using social media platforms (Valkenburg, 2022). According to Brooks (2015), roughly 86% of online adults in the United States (US) use social media, while approximately 79% of adults in Europe use it.

Beyens et al. (2020) shared four recent studies which highlighted associations of individuals showing different indicators of well-being, such as life satisfaction and depression relating to social media use. Individuals' well-being could be measured through their life satisfaction as it relates to their perceived happiness based on their use of social media (Tov, 2018). The well-being of an individual can be determined through multiple factors, such as the evaluation of one's life or a person's frequently pleased feelings. A person's well-being could directly correlate to the perceived happiness of undergraduate students (Beyens et al., 2020).

Social Media as a Distraction

Brooks (2015) highlighted the distraction-conflict theory, which identified how distractions could affect individual performance. Most people fully comprehend how social media can be a significant distraction in multiple ways, potentially detrimental to undergraduate students' happiness (Valkenburg, 2022). Beyens et al., (2020) pointed out that individuals are found to have a positive reaction to their happiness levels when using social media consistently, as it relates to sending messages, posting, shopping, or sharing topics with friends. Even with social media platforms acting as a distraction, the effects on social media users are seen as described above.

Whereas the use of social media becomes an academic distraction, which has become a concern for many educators (Dontre, 2021). According to Krutka et al. (2019), despite the positives of social media use in education, individuals are still driven towards distraction through its use. Kohler et al. (2021) conducted a study that highlighted that, out of 300 participants, 290 of them used social media, where 57% stated they were addicted to social media use, and 66% of them were more concerned with social media than their academic studies. This research will hopefully identify how these types of distractions through social media could tie into undergraduates' perceived happiness.

Social Media and Life Satisfaction

Odaci and Celik (2017) discussed how life satisfaction focuses on one's life positivity based on criteria set by the individual. Life satisfaction and depression are factors that everyone can adequately measure (Longstreet & Brooks, 2017) in terms of their perceived happiness. When identifying life satisfaction through the lens of Festinger's theory of social comparison (1954), one keynote to consider is that individuals should not wish their life to be like others

around them, according to Margolis et al. (2018). This social comparison and its relation to social media could lead undergraduate students to compare themselves to others, relating to their life satisfaction and perceived happiness.

According to Amati et al. (2018), individuals with more robust social relations tend to have higher levels of life satisfaction. Social ties could directly relate to undergraduate students' perceived happiness and life satisfaction (Antaramian, 2017). Further examples of this were identified by Błachnio and Przepiórka (2018), where social media users fear missing out when they cannot immediately check their social media platforms due to the lack of active social relations with others. Antaramian (2017) mentioned that students had more positive social relationships and lower levels of psychopathology symptoms, which suggested there were benefits in having higher levels of life satisfaction. Social media platforms provide an almost constant method for maintaining relationships with others, which could correlate to their current life satisfaction (Pang, 2018).

Life satisfaction has been linked to adults' overall well-being, as indicated by Burger and Samuel (2017). The relationships, academic success/failures, financial stability, and other vital factors could determine an individual's overall life satisfaction as it correlates to their social media use (Coccia & Darling, 2016). The fact that undergraduate students are in the developmental stages of emerging adulthood could be a factor that relates to higher or lower levels of life satisfaction, in turn linking to their perceived happiness. Lastly, Uram and Skalski (2022) noted a significant correlation between Facebook use and life satisfaction due to decreased self-esteem from social media users.

Influences of Social Media

Shopping, electronic mailing, education, and business tools are all examples of which social media is widely used today (Siddiqui & Singh, 2016). This fact alone shows how much social media can influence anyone's life. Whether that influence remains positive or negative could depend on the individual, how they perceive its use, and how they use social media. The positive effects of using social media in the educational realm could relate to better learning styles, enhanced communication, and collaborations (Zachos et al., 2018). However, these aspects could be flipped to negatively influence students' lives, such as decreased performance due to increased social media use, according to Zachos et al., (2018).

According to Siddiqui and Singh (2016), roughly 90% of the college students surveyed used social networks to some extent. Kircaburun et al. (2020) mentioned that social media use has quickly become one of the most popular social behaviors, further saying that two-thirds of internet users use some social media platforms. These facts alone show social media's high influence on the world and, more specifically, in the world of education. Hawi and Samaha (2017) discussed that social media use correlated to self-esteem and life satisfaction. These influences alone highlight social media's potential positive and negative effects.

Positive Influences

Social media's influence could differ between positive and negative, depending on the individual, the content viewed, and its effect on those individuals' perceptions. There are many positive influences social media use could have, especially in the educational realm, such as its increased capabilities in communication and socialization (Siddiqui & Singh, 2016). File-sharing, knowledge-sharing, networking, relationship-building, entertainment, and enjoyment among undergraduates are all seen as positive influences of social media use (Ansari & Khan,

2020). Social media encompasses many different aspects in a person's life, as mentioned above, in turn, leading to many potential effects social media use could have on an undergraduate student.

Manago and Vaugh (2015) highlighted the positive influences social media use could have on a person's perceived happiness, such as receiving uplifting or positive news. Positive relationships between students are also built through social media, as they meet up for study groups and collaboration (Stadtfeld et al., 2019). Abbas et al. (2019) pointed out that raising awareness, building relationships, establishing one's identity, and improving social influence and skills were all related to positive social media use by university students. As social media users' positive and negative influences continue to be studied, it may also begin showing related factors to users' perceived happiness.

Negative Influences

Regarding the potential negative influences of social media use, Manago and Vaugh (2015) identified how social comparison increases drastically with social media use and could lead to long-term negativity in the social media user. This concept correlates to how someone could compare themselves to the *picture-perfect* visual found on social media platforms, leading back to Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory. This could lead individuals to negatively compare themselves to those they view on social media (Meier & Johnson, 2022). Another aspect to consider is the study conducted by Arampatzi et al. (2018), which identified the growing concerns of social isolation due to the continued growth of social media. This concept would include introverted personalities who spend a vast amount of time on their own, increasing their social life through social media use (Gadekar & Ang, 2020).

These both could be seen as potential negative influences of social media use, leading to lower levels of perceived happiness in undergraduate students. Another potential negative of using social media and how it relates to the educational realm is the lack of privacy in students' lives, as discussed by Raut and Patil (2016). According to Kokolakis (2017), privacy is essential to their lives. When this information is publicly displayed for the world to judge, it could lead to a negative mindset for that student. Ties between anxiety and depression through social media use continue to be negative concerns for many social media users; even potential substance abuse could stem from its use (Abaido, 2020).

Social Comparison Relating to Happiness

Individuals' perceived happiness could relate to many potential factors, such as wealth, influence, social status, achievements, and failures (Mandishekwa, 2021). De Vries et al. (2017) examined the positive influence Instagram posts had on viewers, where it was seen to have mixed reactions depending upon individuals' social comparison orientations. These factors, such as wealth, influence, social status, achievements, and failure, could relate to social comparison through social media, as seen above. Those who exhibit this unfavorable social comparison could be seen as having lower perceived happiness, as it would potentially place them in a negative mindset (Yang et al., 2018).

Due to the rise of social networking sites, such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, there is an increase in social comparisons, as they take place at a much larger rate than previously seen (Verduyn et al., 2020). This fundamental need for social interaction has migrated from in-person social cues to more, if not equal, online social interactions as the world advances technologically (De Vries et al., 2017). Whether aware or not, individuals could be allowing what they view to relate to their perceived happiness levels. This use of social comparison stems

from humans' innate need to compare themselves to others they view throughout their day and or lives (Festinger, 1954). According to Baldwin and Mussweiler (2018), decades of psychological research have shown comparison processes in physical objects, personal evaluations, stereotyping, attitudes, and emotions.

Mogilner et al. (2011) conducted a series of studies to help identify happiness factors in all individuals. Still, they concluded that happiness changes throughout a person's life, as their desires, needs, and other factors change as they age. Lastly, a vital concept to consider in correlation to identifying individual perceived happiness is better relating it to an individual's well-being. When discussing well-being, one must consider an individual's overall life satisfaction (Yang et al., 2018). According to Schmuck et al. (2019), predictors of life satisfaction have direct ties to an individual's self-esteem. This is simply one more way to identify and define what an individual's perceived happiness may appear to be. As the term *happiness* is rather vague and relative to the individual, it becomes crucial to highlight what contributions may be present when measuring one's perceived happiness in this study.

Social Media Influences

Social media contains a plethora of information left for the world to view and dissect, which could influence those who view certain types of content (Althoff et al., 2017). Undergraduate students are typically fresh out of high school and out on their own, away from their parents for the first time, as they venture into adulthood for the first time (Coccia & Darling, 2016). Kim (2021) pointed out that social capital provides emotional support, which could be what new undergraduate students need, making them more susceptible to social media influences. Social capital could lead undergraduates to seek emotional help through social media and to discover who they are as individuals. An example is what undergraduate students view on

their social media platforms, such as posting or commenting on a friend's feed for support, as Althoff et al. (2017) mentioned. According to Zhuravskaya et al. (2020), social media can be used to reach and potentially influence its users, such as ads or suggested content by the specific platform.

For example, many individuals view body images on social media platforms, such as Instagram, Pinterest, and Facebook, in turn leading them to wish they could achieve the same, which has been termed by some as *fitspiration* according to Lewallen and Behm-Morawitz (2016). Lewellen and Behm-Morawitz highlighted that females who follow more fitness boards on social media platforms tend to engage in similar activities to achieve their ideal body image. This psychological influence pushes these individuals to achieve the body image they see portrayed on social media platforms, which correlates directly to the theory of social comparison (Kleemans et al., 2018). These social comparison factors could lead to envy among many users (Meier & Johnson, 2022) of social media, leading to potential depression among its members.

Appel et al. (2016) concluded a study showing that Facebook use can encourage envy and, in turn, lead to depression among its members. Users could take these influences to heart and turn them positive or negative, as Siddiqui and Singh (2016) described. In turn, the risk of depression, due to these influences, could lower their perceived happiness and lead to other negative influences, such as depression (Liu et al., 2022). These very same concepts could provide an understanding of how social media use could relate to the perceived happiness of undergraduate students.

When it comes to undergraduate students, concepts of envy and depression could easily set in due to their social media use, as mentioned by Appel et al. (2016). In turn, this could push individuals to seek out nearby connections through social media to establish new relationships,

as Althoff et al. (2017) mentioned. Rozgonjuk et al. (2019) revealed that passive Facebook use among individuals had higher adverse outcomes, such as social anxiety, loneliness, jealousy, and depression. Beyens et al. (2020) identified that the well-being of the individuals studied differed significantly from adolescent to adolescent.

Social comparison plays a significant role in social media use for undergraduate students due to the considerable influence it may hold (Althoff et al., 2017). Chae (2018) demonstrated that social comparison could negatively influence individuals' happiness levels due to the potential dangers of depression or anxiety. Social media users' social identities contributed to the type of social comparison and envy they experienced and how it related to them positively or negatively, as Latif et al. (2021) described. Each social media user experiences social comparison differently through their social media use, as the mentioned studies have shown.

However, studies have indicated conflicting findings on how social media use can relate to individuals' happiness, well-being, or even self-image through the lens of social comparison. Yang and Robinson (2018) found that social comparison is inherently detrimental through social media, as it could yield depression or anxiety in its users. Whereas Diel et al. (2021) highlighted potential positives social media influences could have through downward comparison. Studies here show conflicting findings of results relating to social media use. However, Beyens et al. (2020) concluded in their study that passive use of social media in adolescents may differ from one to another. The different influences social media can have on social media users, as discussed above, leaves room for additional research to be conducted in hopes of further understanding this phenomenon.

However, another study by Appel et al. (2016) showed significant relations to Facebook use, leading social media users to develop envious thoughts and depression. These findings could

highlight considerable decreases in undergraduate students' perceived happiness through social media influences. Individuals could experience envy, depression, or anxiety due to their personal experiences while using social media and the influences they experience through its use (Seabrook et al., 2016). Characteristics of envy or depression could be linked to lower perceived happiness through the lens of social comparison (Meier & Johnson, 2022). For undergraduate students, this could be a significant emotional event.

In comparison, Lewellen and Behm-Morawitz (2016) singled out females' social media use and how it influenced them to try self-enhancing techniques to achieve with what they compare themselves on social media sites. Retrospectively these women who cannot attain the goals they have viewed on social media could end up experiencing envy and depression (Meier & Johnson, 2022), lowering their perceived happiness. Studies have shown different factors, such as depression, envy, self-imaging, failure, and positive and even negative influences, relating to social media use (Behm-Morawitz, 2016). However, not much has been correlated with studying social media use and its relation to undergraduates' perceived happiness through its influence. This study will hopefully shine a light on previous research and provide a better understanding of the links between social media use and perceived happiness in undergraduate students.

Social Environment and Social Media

Another factor to discuss when trying to understand how social media use could relate to undergraduate students' perceived happiness is the environment they place themselves in. Increases in the potential dangers of depression in social media users could be seen, depending on how much time they spend on these social media platforms (Liu et al., 2022). Individuals who continuously place themselves in a stressful environment, such as the content they view on social

media, may begin experiencing stressful events, leading to lower life satisfaction, according to Longstreet and Brookes (2017).

The type of environment undergraduate students put themselves in could lead to being more actively involved with their university community, in turn showing higher, or lower levels of life satisfaction (Antaramian, 2017). Longstreet and Brooks (2017) pointed out that individuals who find things more positive in their lives may tend to experience higher levels of life satisfaction. According to Kim and Shen (2020), different social media activities fulfill different social needs of their users. As such, the learning environment students find themselves in becomes vital to their overall success, as a neat and peaceful environment showed a positive correlation in a study conducted by Asvio (2022). Adversely, when students envelop themselves in the social media world, it may detract from their positive environment, dependent upon the content they regularly view. It is important for undergraduate students to remember that they control the environment and activities in which they place themselves, leading to different influences in their lives.

Social Media and Education

The education system is changing rapidly from print and published books to a repository of digital information through the internet. Many know that cell phones are used for exchanging information, from looking for someone to date to simply looking for a house. However, social media may help students connect with the world and acquire new knowledge. For example, introverted students who are uncomfortable answering questions in class may seek guidance through social media instead (Sharma et al., 2022). Social media in education promotes students' use of active learning to foster a higher order of thinking and develop increased critical thinking skills (Greenhow et al., 2019).

Burbulus (2016) highlighted social media being used widely among teachers and students as a teaching resource. Using social media as a teaching resource provides additional methods for students to learn and grow throughout their educational journey. Some teachers used Facebook to relay the implementation of new learning approaches (Van Den Beemt et al., 2020). Educators use various software tools and free web applications to help increase their learning capabilities for their students (Raut & Patil, 2016).

Social media use in education can create new learning relationships for students and faculty alike, as they connect individuals through Facebook, Twitter, and other like platforms (Raut & Patil, 2016). While social media use in education continues to grow, there are still potential implications that could relate to social media use in the classroom. Positive and negative influences of social media use in education could easily exist across the spectrum (Zachos et al., 2018), relating directly to undergraduates' perceived happiness.

Influences of Social Media on Education

Potentially positive influences of social media in education are the different tools social media can provide to assist with others' learning styles (Raut & Patil, 2016). Zachos et al. (2018) pointed out that using social media in education provides new perspectives in acquiring unknown knowledge. These new methods and uses provided students with advances in learning methods that may have yet to be so easily attainable in the past. General student uses of social media in education included discussions on their assignments online and other course work, including information on class schedules, forums, and information amongst their peers (Boateng & Amankwaa, 2016). As seen above, the positive influences of social media use in education are abundant. These uses provide students with new ways of learning, communicating, completing assignments, and building new relationships.

Many students claimed that using social media in the classroom promoted communication and learning methods (Van Den Beemt et al., 2020). A highly sought benefit to using social media in education is the potential community building it provides to establish more connectedness among students (Greenhow et al., 2019). Relationship building is vital to social media use in education, such as promoting a technology-enhanced learning environment through platforms like Facebook (Manca & Ranieri, 2016). Siddiqui and Singh (2016) also pointed out how students who usually require more of an investment in certain classroom participations may find that interest through social media platforms. Social media use in the classroom could allow otherwise disassociated students to become interested in the learning topic or even establish new positive relationships with other students (Greenhow et al., 2019).

One of the main focuses of social media is to build communities and relationships. At the same time, using these platforms in education could lead to the development of innate leadership skills in the students (Raut & Patil, 2016). Planning, organizing, political, and personal goal setting are all concepts that could be promoted through social media within education, as Raut and Patil (2016) mentioned. Research continues to show many positives and negatives of social media use in education (Zachos et al., 2018), where the students learn, develop, and grow in less easily attainable ways before its inception. With research showing both positive and negative findings on social media use in education, there remains a need to further clarify the phenomenon of social media use and the perceived happiness of undergraduate students.

Akram and Kumar (2017) listed some adverse effects of social media in education, such as reduced learning and research capabilities due to students relying heavily on information found on social media instead of reliable sources. Other potential negatives of social media pointed out by Akram and Kumar are the loss of motivation, critical writing skills, and lower

grades. Siddiqui and Singh (2016) highlighted a crucial point: teachers cannot verify which students are directly paying attention in class due to their active use of social media, which leads to direct distractions. However, according to Van Den Beemt et al. (2020), social media has been seen to replace certain aspects of traditional curriculum in the classroom, which could relate to potential student distractions. Distractions within the classroom could lead to students having adverse effects on their academic journeys, as Zacho et al. (2018) mentioned.

Research showed the potential risk of inappropriate information leading students astray and promoting false information in their studies (Siddiqui & Singh, 2016). One concern is how incorrect information, as it begins to be shared more and more throughout different sources, becomes more easily believable among viewers who fail to fact-check (Figueira & Oliveira, 2017). Along the same route of disinformation, concerns about the professional relationships between students and teachers due to social media interactions remain a concern (Manca & Ranirie, 2016). The potential negative influences of the research highlighted above could easily show potential discord within the students' lives relating to their perceived happiness. Students are more likely to devote time to social media use than academic activities, such as studying for exams or conducting relevant research (Lau, 2017). Social media used in education, whether directly within the classroom or in the student's own time, may demonstrate potential adverse effects, relying entirely on the specific undergraduate student.

Another potential negative effect social media use may have on education is the lack of privacy it provides its users. Students freely post private information throughout their social media platforms, leaving it for anyone with access to see, judge, and redistribute (Raut & Patil, 2016). Many students argue about using social media in terms of public, private, academic, and social use (Smith, 2016). Social media use in education could cause distraction, spelling and

grammar issues, difficulties retaining information, and lower interpersonal skills (Sharma et al., 2022).

Building Relationships in Academia

According to McCabe (2016), many college students devote a vast amount of time and energy to friendships and connections, as they find themselves surrounded by same-age students attending classes, eating, and socializing together. The relationships, experiences, and knowledge gained during college could fundamentally shape them for the rest of their life (Raposa et al., 2021). Online relationships can be seen through social media, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat. Some relationships experienced by these individuals are shared through the development of cultural roles with those they are entering into a relationship with, such as environments within social media platforms (Demetriou et al., 2017). Building these types of relationships through social media platforms for undergraduate students could relate to their perceived happiness through their successes and failures.

Social Media and Relationships

Relationships play a vital role in the life satisfaction of undergraduate students, as they may have to develop new friendships and bonds as they venture away from home (Amati et al., 2018). According to a study by Coccia and Darling (2016), college-age students enjoy extreme fun, yet they find themselves the most stressed out of all the other age groups. These stressors during this vital transition in these undergraduate students' lives can lead to lower life satisfaction, as their academics and relationships could suffer. Coccia and Darling also highlighted the importance of relationships in college students' lives, as it drastically influences their overall life satisfaction.

Establishing positive relationships could provide higher life satisfaction and higher perceived happiness overall (Amati et al., 2018). At the same time, someone stressed out due to failing relationships could see lower levels of life satisfaction. Madhia and Akhouri (2018) discussed how life satisfaction is affected by self-fulfillment, in which the individual's happiness rests in how they perceive their life to be going. Undergraduate students' level of life satisfaction may drastically fall if they perceive relationships as not going as they would like due to lower social capital (Garaee et al., 2019).

Many college students use relationships to help them adapt and integrate themselves into the college experience during their first year (Rucks-Ahidiana & Bork, 2020). People tend to have an inherent need to belong and develop connections with others (Twenge et al., 2019). Twenge et al. (2019) also pointed out that during the Boomer era in the late 1970s, 52% of 12th graders said they got together with their friends daily, but only 28% said they did this. Rucks-Ahidiana and Bork (2020) also discussed that many college students needed to cut ties with off-campus relationships, as they tended to distract their overall collegiate experience based on the rights of passage model.

A study by Berry (2018) showed that in-person orientation courses for students showed an increase in building relationships with other students, as opposed to an online orientation. Demetriou et al. (2017) pointed out that how these students perceive these experiences could determine their development. These studies identified areas where undergraduates experience in-person relationships while enrolled in a university. According to Le et al. (2021), ensuring a positive relationship with undergraduate students could be beneficial for undergraduate students.

Online relationships relate to connections through Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat, and to clarify, not just being marked as a *friend*, as mentioned by Wolf et al. (2018). This type of

social support could be vital to undergraduate students' perceived happiness from either the success or failure of these relationships. The students social support could also lessen if these online relationships are only one-way (Radovic et al., 2017). According to Demetriou et al. (2017), some links made through online platforms lead students to be more engaged in coursework, undergraduate research, traveling abroad, and community service.

Kayaduman et al. (2022) pointed out that students need to put forth more effort in online interactions with others than face-to-face. This study pointed out students' need to build relationships with others online instead of in-person interactions. Le et al. (2021) conducted a survey involving mentoring relationships with college students, which showed correlations between these positive relationships and the student's mental health. Kayaduman et al. (2018) highlighted a positive correlation between students' self-regulation in their own online interactions and digital literacy scores. Some researchers have studied the ability of an online environment and how it provides a sounder social space for student collaboration (Chatterjee & Correia, 2020). These studies show the effects online relationships could have on undergraduate students and how they could correlate to their perceived happiness through their use and, in turn, social media use.

Social Media Addiction

Being addicted to social media could potentially have increasingly adverse effects on the individual's perceived happiness, mental health, depression, and anxiety (Allred & Atkin, 2020). To some, the dangers of these types of addictions are known; however, others who ignore the potential risks of internet and social media addiction tend to experience the negative consequences of it (Longstreet & Brooks, 2017). Undergraduate students should be aware of social media addiction's risks and potential relation to their perceived happiness.

Human beings have an innate desire to feel connected to others, and with the rapid growth of information technology, how people can connect has evolved drastically (Hou et al., 2019). For many individuals, the desire to connect and stay connected to others could border on addiction, as they fall into depressive states of mind when unable to maintain these connections, leading to a compulsive need to use social media (Hou et al., 2019). Allred and Atkin (2020) even pointed out that phone usage and increased anxiety are linked, as one increase could lead to a rise in the other. Those individuals who are more preoccupied with their offline relationships could find themselves using the online environment as a virtual escape to better protect themselves from feelings of loneliness and their fears or discomfort with offline interactions (D'Arienzo et al., 2019).

These issues could lead undergraduate students to reach out for new connections on social media, as it can be quicker, according to Allred and Atkin (2020). As seen in this study, building new connections through social media can be more accessible and, in turn, attract undergraduate students more efficiently. There are aspects of social media use and how it can negatively relate to the perceived happiness of undergraduate students regarding their stress and mental health (Hou et al., 2019). According to Vonasch et al. (2017), it is widely considered that addiction in a person's life typically means they have lost their free will. Allred and Atkin (2020) also pointed out that responding to texts, playing games, or checking social media for new information could become a compulsive habit.

Individuals with social media addiction are often driven to check their social media platforms without hesitation (Hou et al., 2019). The use of social media, as well as the internet, has been conceptualized as a behavioral addiction instead of a substance addiction (D'Arienzo et al., 2019). As described in these studies, this addiction could be related to undergraduates'

perceived happiness, as they are urged to constantly focus and check their social media. According to Grau et al. (2019), addiction has been described as a consumer product; however, in this case, it is argued that the perceived value of social media for college-aged student millennials could be classified as something they consume.

Social media addiction could be classified as a behavioral addiction, as it could relate to the user's euphoria (Allred & Atkin, 2020). According to Demir (2021), while social media is beneficial, it has become clear that some individuals, even more adolescents, have become addicted to social media. Baturay and Toker (2019) highlighted a study in which widespread internet addiction exists among middle school, high school, and university students. Times have changed drastically for children, teens, young adults, and adults rushing straight toward the internet and all it has to offer to occupy their time.

According to a study by Baltaci (2019), university students' social anxiety, happiness, and even loneliness are significant factors that predict their social media addiction. These types of addiction could be related to undergraduates' perceived happiness through further research. If these students are addicted to social media, whether known or unknown, it could lead to distractions from their academic responsibilities to overcome a feeling of emptiness (D'Arienzo et al., 2019). If undergraduate students are flocking to social media to overcome feelings of emptiness, there could be a link between social media use and undergraduates' perceived happiness.

Health Factors Relating to Social Media Use

Social media dependency could lead to mental and physical health concerns in students, as even teenagers are drowning in serious issues, such as depression, isolation, and anxiety, as social media use reduces their physical presence in the real world (Sharma et al., 2022). A study

by Asibong et al. (2020) aimed at internet addiction's effect on mental health showed the beneficial effects of internet use among undergraduate students. Asibong et al. also identified that approximately one-fifth (20.1%) of the study respondents had moderate to- severe -forms of internet addiction, while one-third (33.1%) suffered from some psychological distress.

Prolonged social media use could relate to an individual's mental and physical health if not careful, such as increased stress, anxiety, and depression (Hou et al., 2019). These factors could also lead to physical ailments, such as increases or decreases in weight and other physical health concerns, from prolonged use of cellular devices and computers, such as the potential risk of carpal tunnel and other factors influencing individuals' fingers, hands, wrists, and joints (Kwok et al., 2021). Prolonged use could even lead to users improperly self-diagnosing their health concerns (Akram & Kumar, 2017)

Coyne et al. (2020) identified results of multiple longitudinal studies which showed a mixture of positive and negative influences on individuals' mental health while using social media platforms. Berryman et al. (2018) conducted a study identifying various mental health concerns related to social media use, such as loneliness, suicidal thoughts, and decreased empathy. Other factors, like physical conditions, could be linked to social media use. Baker et al. (2016) discussed the fear of missing out on individuals' use of social media, which could lead to physical conditions, such as increased anxiety when the user feels wary that they are missing out on social connections. Mental and physical aspects will be discussed in further detail to further understand these two factors for this study.

Mental Factors

Mental factors, such as anxiety, depression, and stress are easily seen through the extended use of social media platforms (Asibong et al., 2020). Social media users can notice

changes in their overall mental health when they overuse social media (Berryman et al., 2018).

For example, those who utilize social media daily could experience higher levels of depression

when they experience extended periods without accessing their social media accounts (Asibong

et al., 2020). Time spent while utilizing social media was found to moderately influence an

individual's anxiety and depression levels, according to Coyne et al. (2020).

In just the last decade or so, multiple studies have shown a direct link between youth and

adolescent mental distress about the use of social media (Abi-Jaoude et al., 2020). Mental

distress could be related to the perceived happiness in undergraduate students through further

research. Another vital aspect to consider is how many youths and adolescents communicate

threats of self-harm using social media, according to Abi-Jaoude et al. (2020). This fact alone is

alarming in that there are clear connections between social media use, mental health, and how it

could relate to the perceived happiness in its users.

According to Berryman et al. (2018), *Facebook depression* has been linked to users who

spend too much time on social media. The issue with studies relating to social media stems from

the continuously mixed results from related studies regarding connections between mental health

issues and social media use. Identifying links through further research between mental health and

social media use could show relations to undergraduates' perceived happiness.

Another vital aspect of social media and its relation to users' mental health, especially in

adolescents and undergraduate students, is identifying how it relates to cyberbullying. Watts et

al. (2017) highlighted that cyberbullying can influence anyone and have lasting influences on

one's mental health. According to Garett et al. (2018), studies have shown that cyberbullying is

more commonly linked to youths than adults. However, these factors could translate from the

child to the undergraduate student if they were previously a victim of cyberbullying, in turn

cyberbullying others (Watts et al., 2017). By identifying all these factors relating to mental health and social media, it becomes easier to link potential factors to the perceived levels of happiness in undergraduate students through their use of social media.

Physical Factors

Not only are there mental factors that influence social media users, such as anxiety, depression, and stress, but physical factors could also relate to their users. The most significant physical factor to identify is how the user's stress, anxiety, and depression influences the physical health of social media users. Chau et al. (2018) identified how many social media users seek health-related information through social media use, as they are more receptive to its influence. The use of social media for health-related interventions to improve overall health shows promise (Chau et al., 2018). These are potential positive effects of social media on users' physical health.

Examples, such as induced sicknesses, lack of sleep, and lower activity levels are negative physical factors to look for (Baker et al., 2016). When undergraduate students experience these biological factors, it could easily lead to lower perceived happiness and, in turn, could influence their overall academic experience. Dibbs (2019) highlighted a previous study that showed how social comparison could lead to differing perceptions of users' overall physical health. Social comparison could relate to the user's physical health, as it could influence the user positively or negatively. Kleeman et al. (2018) pointed out how social media, such as Instagram, led to body dissatisfaction through upward social comparison. It could also lead to negative physical health factors, which may force negative body changes.

Summary

As social media is a continuously evolving phenomenon today, it begs the question of how it relates to undergraduate students' perceived happiness. Uchida and Oishi (2016) defined *happiness* as a feeling or satisfaction in one's life. Undergraduates' perceived happiness could be jeopardized due to their social media use, as depression and envy could set in, as Latif et al. (2021) mentioned. There are so many positives and negatives of social media use, such as increased communication, business promotion, hacking, and lack of privacy, according to Siddiqui and Singh (2016). Avom and Malah (2022) pointed out some key areas of concern regarding social media use: the physical and mental health of social media users, identity and belonging, and safety concerns. There is a plethora of research regarding social media use as a whole but limited research on how it relates to the perceived happiness in undergraduate students.

Research remains sparse to answer how social media use, through the lens of social comparison, could relate to the perceived happiness of undergraduate students. Latif et al. (2021), discussed benign envy as an inherited trait that revolves around social comparison through social media use. Research has shown that many factors relating to social media use remain, such as increased anxiety, depression, envy, self-esteem, and well-being, as discussed by Avom and Malah (2022). This research provided further theoretical insight into the phenomenon of social media and links to Leon Festinger's theory of social comparison. Lastly, this study contributed to the field of education, as further understanding of social media use relating to the perceived happiness in undergraduate students may provide educators, social media users, students, and more the chance to understand its potential effects further.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to understand how undergraduate students describe their experiences with social media and how it is related to their perceived happiness. The methods of data collection I utilized for this study will be journal entries, individual interviews, and focus groups. Once transcribed, I analyzed the data through NVivo to identify themes from the collected data. The setting for the study, the participants, and the researcher's role is discussed. Lastly, the data collecting methods, data analysis, how trustworthiness is established, and any ethical considerations are discussed.

Research Design

This qualitative study used the phenomenological approach to understand the participants' experiences through observation in the real world (Creswell & Poth, 2017). By using the qualitative approach, I gained further understanding of the experience undergraduates have while using social media, as well as its relation to their perceived happiness. The phenomenological approach is seen or believed as one's reality or truth (Moustakas, 1994). According to Cypress (2018), using phenomenology as a research design allows the researcher to gather interview data to better understand each participant's experiences. Choosing the phenomenological approach provided vital insight into each participant's experiences with social media use and how it could relate to their perceived happiness.

The transcendental approach was used throughout this study due to its reach for furthering human understanding through experiences with social media use. This allowed a more vivid sense of undergraduates' lived experiences using social media and how they relate to their perceived happiness. Gros (2017) described the transcendental approach to phenomenology as a

rigorous science to build a foundation for scientific knowledge. Creswell and Poth (2017) described the transcendental approach, as identifying a phenomenon, highlighting individuals' experiences, and collecting data from multiple participants.

Through the experiences of the undergraduates and documenting the data received, I gained a more in-depth look into how social media use relates to their perceived happiness. Jääskeläinen (2022) and Moustakas (1994) discussed that the transcendental approach provides a more meaningful approach to a qualitative study. Moustakas also highlighted how researchers need to be explicit with their own experiences to properly understand the phenomenon, where I viewed all findings through a fresh lens to avoid any potential bias. This was the focal point of choosing this approach for this study to understand further the experiences undergraduates had while using social media and its relation to their perceived happiness.

Research Questions

The central research question below, followed by two sub-questions, are the guiding points to the study.

Central Research Question

How do undergraduate students describe their lived experiences with social media as it relates to their perceived happiness?

Sub-Question One

How do undergraduate students describe their lived experiences with social comparison as it relates to their perceived happiness?

Sub-Question Two

How do undergraduate students describe their lived experiences with social comparison as it relates to their social media use?

Setting and Participants

This section discusses the setting for the study, where it will take place, where participants will be selected, and any further permission and guidance required. The setting for the study highlighted key information regarding where the study took place. The participant requirements discussed included the age range, geographical location, and any other pertinent information required for the study's progression. The participants were selected based on specific requirements outlined for the study.

Setting

Due to the participants' physical limitations, this study's setting was virtual through Facebook. This social media platform is widely utilized and provided sufficient participants for this study. Participants were limited to those residing in the United States, to better ensure limited language and cultural barriers for the study. By gathering my needed participants from Facebook, I was able to ensure each participant had direct experience with social media use.

Participants

This study included 10 participants to adhere to the phenomenological standards outlined by Creswell and Poth (2017). Individuals selected for this study were over the age of 18 and were required to be presently enrolled in an undergraduate program at any university within the United States. Creswell and Poth (2017) also noted the importance of participants' real-world experiences with the phenomenon being studied. This requirement was essential to ensure the study can revolve around the lived experiences of the participants selected in this study.

Researcher Positionality

I have always found a passion for studying human behavior regarding social media's effects on an individual's lived experiences. When it comes to how social media could

potentially relate to the perceived happiness in individuals has always piqued my interest. Using social comparison by Festinger (1954) as the foundation for this study, I was able to better understand undergraduates' lived experiences while using social media and how social media related to their perceived happiness. The following sections focused on the interpretive framework through which the study may be seen and the three philosophical assumptions further guiding the study.

Interpretive Framework

Social constructivism was the framework through which this study was conducted. Social constructivism is a paradigm or worldview which seeks a more thorough understanding of individuals' experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2017). This study focused on better understanding the experiences undergraduate students go through when using social media and how it is related to their perceived happiness. The reasoning behind using social constructivism as the framework was due to the nature of the study. Further understanding the lived experiences of social media usage and its relation to perceived happiness may allow educators, users, and more the chance to understand further the phenomenon, which is social media. As Creswell and Poth discussed, social constructivism is the experience individuals face, which is the purpose of this study.

Philosophical Assumptions

Philosophical assumptions were discussed to provide a clearer view of the reasoning and motivations behind this study. Ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological were described to better understand my thought processes behind this study. I have always valued the ability to look through multiple lenses and perspectives to better understand new concepts, ideologies, and practices. By understanding and articulating the three philosophical assumptions, I was able to show this perspective as it relates to my study.

Ontological Assumption

Of the three philosophical assumptions, ontology is the leading assumption from my perspective on what drives this study. According to Creswell and Poth (2017), ontology relates to the nature of realities and their characteristics, allowing us to understand multiple realities simultaneously. This continued to lend further weight to the study, focusing on understanding its participants' lived experiences and how they relate to their perceived happiness. By conducting this study, I was able to further understand the participants' differing realities and experiences. Lastly, this study highlighted how the use of social media relates to their perceived happiness and how this varied is different ways.

Epistemological Assumption

Regarding the epistemological approach, I gained as much knowledge about the participants and their lived experiences with social media use as possible. This allowed a better understanding of the study's results as they related to each individual and what factors caused the results to differ. In the case of epistemological assumptions, the researcher needs to get as close to the participants as possible (Creswell & Poth, 2017). However, with this study mainly completed from a distance, I put as much effort into understanding each participant's experiences. When possible, additional time to communicate and interact with each participant became necessary to further my understanding of each participant and their individual experiences throughout the study. By doing this, the knowledge I gleaned became vital in further understanding the participants' experiences and furthering the insight gained for this study.

Axiological Assumption

As an avid social media user, I know how social media use could influence my mental state and my own perceived happiness. This includes my values, as social media platforms, such

as Facebook, could relate to individuals' cultural dimensions (Sheldon et al., 2020). I needed to ensure my personal opinions, biases, and values were separate from the study's findings, and in no way influenced their synchrony. I believe that the use of social media, depending upon what content the user is subjecting themselves to consistently, could relate to their perceived happiness. When it comes to my assumptions on values, I believe that the use of social media, to an extent, could influence one's values through the influences they expose themselves to. If an individual constantly subjected themselves to harmful content, then it would stand to reason that their perceived happiness levels may be lower, and their values become influenced. This is where I believe society has become overly dependent on finding their perceived happiness through social media use while experiencing social comparison.

Researcher's Role

My role as the researcher for this study was to be the instrument used in further understanding the experiences of undergraduate students using social media and how it relates to their perceived happiness. As an adult male today, I have grown up in a world full of social media since MySpace was first created. This has given me a unique look into how social media could relate to certain aspects of an individual's life, as I have experienced firsthand. I have seen that social media refers to individuals' negative and positive mindsets and how it relates to their own perceived happiness. I fully understand the role I find myself in for this study and what is required of me to move forward.

I have had no prior experience or knowledge of the participants of this study beforehand, leading to no internal bias towards them. My one personal bias through this study is my belief that social media use relates to its users' perceived happiness. Moustakas (1994) identified bracketing, or the need for researchers to determine their own experiences to understand the

phenomenon correctly. To avoid allowing this bias to interfere with the study's findings, I made sure to adhere to strict guidelines and analyzed the data without allowing personal thoughts and judgments to interfere.

Procedures

The procedures for this study began by obtaining permission from the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct the study. Appendix A includes a copy of the IRB approval. Criterion sampling was utilized to gather the necessary participants through Facebook (See Appendix B: Recruitment Request). As each participant was identified, they were provided an information sheet, describing the study's parameters, recording procedures, and their assurance of confidentiality (See Appendix C: Information Sheet). This was done to ensure data collection began as soon as all participants were gathered.

Data were gathered through journal prompts, individual interviews, and focus group interviews. Requirements for each participant to accomplish a journal entry at the beginning of the study were explained, and dates and times for individual interviews were established. Once the study concluded, all data were analyzed with NVivo and hand-coded to identify liked themes and definitions pertinent to the study, which helped ensure validity within the study. The findings were then reported after the data were appropriately gathered and analyzed.

Permissions

Permission to conduct the study was sought through Liberty University's IRB board (See Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter). Once appropriate approval through the IRB was granted, I was able to begin the study. Site approval through Facebook to gather the needed participants was unnecessary as it is an open-source social media platform.

Recruitment Plan

The type of sampling I used was the criterion sampling method due to the requirements for participants to have experience with social media. Creswell and Poth (2018) described criterion sampling as meeting specific criteria, such as participants' experience in the phenomenon being studied. My study consisted of 10 undergraduate students over the age of 18 who resided in the United States. Participants also had to have social media experience and be recruited through Facebook (See Appendix B: Recruitment Request). The purpose behind limiting the participants to 10-15 undergraduate students was to achieve saturation, which Creswell and Poth (2017) described as when the researcher does not need to continue collecting further information due to no additional knowledge or data. Once the participants were selected, they were provided with an Information Sheet (See Appendix C: Information Sheet) to understand what they were asked throughout the study. This recruitment plan ensured adequate data were collected for this study.

Data Collection Plan

For my study, I utilized three data collection methods. The selected data collection methods provided me with the appropriate information to better understand the experiences of social media use for undergraduate students and how it related to their perceived happiness. The data collection methods discussed below are the journal entries, individual interviews, and focus groups. I chose this data collection plan to allow participants to write about their lived experiences with social media at the beginning of the study and how they believed it related to their perceived happiness. This ensured each participant had the opportunity to document initial information, ideas, or notices, which held some importance at the end of the study.

Secondly, I had the participants conduct their journal prompts first in hopes of better understanding the lived experiences of everyone, followed by interviews with everyone, and then with each focus group. Creswell and Poth (2018) stated the need for researchers to collect data from multiple sources to establish triangulation and ensure proper study credit. By selecting the three outlined data collection methods, I was able to gather equally significant amounts of data related to the phenomenon from each participant.

Journal Prompts

Using a journal prompt at the beginning of the study provided a baseline foundation of each participant's experiences with social media use and how it relates to their perceived happiness. Rudrum et al. (2022) described the reasoning behind using journal prompts to better recount experiences over time. Journal prompts allow the participants to record their lived experiences of social media use and how it could relate to their perceived happiness from their perspective.

Participants were given up to two weeks to accomplish the journal prompt (See Appendix D: Journal Prompts). Each journal prompt took the participants 10-15 minutes to answer. They were asked to record their personal experiences relating to social media use and how the personal experiences relating to social media could have affected their perceived happiness. The participants were then asked to focus on what they viewed, interacted with, posted, shared, commented on, and communicated with on their social media platforms (See Appendix D: Journal Prompts).

Journal prompts were completed to provide thorough research into each participant's experiences with social media and how it could have related to their perceived happiness from their unique perspective. Creswell and Poth (2018) pointed out potential issues with journaling in

which the researcher could have difficulty reading the participant's handwriting. To alleviate any potential problems by understanding the prompts provided by the participants, I had the participants provide their journal prompts back to me through email exchange.

Journal Prompt Questions

1. What type of content do you spend the most time viewing on your social media platforms? (CRQ)

2. How do you feel when you do not have immediate access to your social media platforms? (CRQ)

3. How does the use of social media influence your relationships? (CRQ, SQ1)

4. Describe a time you viewed social media content that made you happy. (SQ1, SQ2)

5. Describe a time you viewed social media content that made you angry. (SQ1, SQ2)

6. Describe the type of content most frequently on your social media feeds. (CRQ, SQ1, SQ2)

The use of journal prompts for this study allowed the participants to reflect on the questions provided and establish detailed information regarding their personal experiences with social media use and how it could relate to their perceived happiness. Lutz and Peretti (2019) discussed the use of journaling, as it could help elaborate on specific experiences from the participant to aid in establishing triangulation. Questions one, two, and three were developed to focus on the central research question. By answering these three questions, the participants provided fruitful information about the phenomenon of social media use from their own lived experiences. Questions three, four, five, and six were developed to answer the first sub-question by allowing the participants to focus on their lived experiences with social media and how it made them feel. Lastly, questions four, five, and six were specifically developed to answer the

second sub-question. These questions were designed to pull specific thoughts from the participants to focus on social media use and social comparison from their perspectives. The views and emotions elicited from these questions provided some light into the phenomenon of social media and how it related to undergraduates' perceived happiness.

Journal Prompt Data Analysis Plan

The data gathered from the journal entries was analyzed, beginning with the epoché, which is described by Moustakas (1994), which allowed the researcher to focus on viewing the data through a new lens without any preconceived biases or notions toward the phenomenon of the study, as if it were their first time. I then proceed with the phenomenological reduction two-step process, allowing me to understand the information gathered through a new perspective and see them for what they are. By using this method, I was able to view the information and understand the participants' lived experiences from their perspectives, as opposed to my own. By allowing myself to set aside any previous perspectives of social media use and viewing all data as if it were my first time, I was able to better able to bracket common themes, focusing on the research topic, where I was able to separate any data not related to the research. I was then able to use the imaginative variation process to approach the study from a new perspective, role, and function. To accomplish this, I meditated on the data and focused on the *how* of the phenomenon. This allowed me to further develop structural descriptions of the data and highlight the participants' lived experiences.

Lastly, I began integrating textural and structural descriptions in a unified state of the experience for the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The journal entries from the participants were accepted as they were, with no corrections being made by the researcher unless directed by the participant. The journal entries were validated by the participants one final time to ensure

they had no necessary corrections to be made. The data analysis was completed through hand coding and inputting into NVivo. I also developed a table to provide a more visual representation of the horizonalization method being used, as mentioned by Moustakas, which portrayed critical themes of the study.

Individual Interviews

Individual interviews effectively promoted brainstorming during the session and fuel more personal experiences (Guest et al., 2017). A time was scheduled with each participant, and a test video and audio capabilities over Microsoft Teams was accomplished with each participant to ensure the program recorded the session adequately. Moustakas (1994) pointed out that interview questions should be broad to promote rich answers from the participant. During the individual interviews, I established a working relationship between the interviewee and myself to help them feel comfortable with the process. To start the interview, I asked each participant questions designed to ease them and allow them to feel comfortable and more willing to share the desired information. After this, I began the interview questions, allowing the participants adequate time to answer.

Individual Interview Questions

1. What does happiness mean to you? (CRQ, SQ1)

2. What are your experiences with social media platforms? (CRQ)

3. Why do you use certain social media platforms over others? (CRQ)

4. What is the purpose(s) behind your use of social media platforms? (CRQ)

5. What factors drive you to post, share, and comment on social media content? (CRQ, SQ1, SQ2)

6. What type of content do you spend the most time viewing and interacting with on social media platforms? (CRQ)

7. What are your feelings when you use social media platforms? (CRQ, SQ1)

8. Describe how comparing yourself to others on social media could affect your perceived happiness. (SQ1)

9. How would you describe your own perceived happiness? (SQ1)

10. How do you feel after spending time on social media platforms? (SQ1)

11. What does social comparison mean to you? (SQ1, SQ2)

12. What type of individuals do you follow on social media platforms? (SQ2)

13. Why do you follow certain types of individuals on social media? (SQ2)

14. What are your feelings when you view other people's successes on social media platforms? (SQ2)

15. What are your feelings when you view other people's failures on social media platforms? (SQ2)

16. What else would you like to add regarding your lived experiences with social media and its relation to your perceived happiness? (CRQ)

The data gathered here was synthesized to align further with the established research questions. Questions one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, and 16 were designed to seek detailed information from the participants who lived through experiences with social media and how it could relate to their perceived happiness to answer the central research question. As mentioned by Creswell and Poth (2018), interviews are used to better understand the experiences the participants have from their perspective. These questions followed Chae's (2018) findings on how passive social media use could make one unhappy through social comparison. By

understanding that each participant has a unique situation while using social media, I was able to understand further how it could relate to the phenomenon being studied.

Questions five, seven, eight, nine, 10, and 11 follow Frechette's et al. (2020) approach to understand better a new perspective of the questions being asked. These questions were designed to allow better undergraduates to describe their experiences with happiness in relation to social comparison. Uchida (2016) pointed out how difficult it is to define happiness due to its subjective nature. In this case, the aim was to understand a new perspective on describing and conceptualizing the concept of perceived happiness for each participant. These questions were developed to gain more insight into how the participants describe their experiences with happiness related to social comparison. As the concept of *happiness* is vastly vague in its definition and does not necessarily apply to each person, the perceived happiness of the participants was the focus.

Questions five, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15 were developed to answer the second sub-question by providing insight into the participant's use of social media and how it relates to social comparison. These questions ensured a more overall focus on each participant's experiences while using social media, as Frechette et al. (2020) described. These questions provided additional insight into the participants' social media experiences and how social comparison ties into this concept.

Individual Data Analysis Plan

All data gathered through the individual interviews was entered into NVivo and hand-coded to establish descriptive and like themes. As Creswell and Poth (2017) described, interpreting, and assessing the data allows the researcher to examine the lessons learned. I began my analysis of the individual interviews with the epoché process, which allowed me to leave all

biases and preconceived notions behind as if I were viewing the data and phenomenon for the first time (Moustakas, 1994). Following this process, I moved on to the phenomenological reduction process, which Moustakas described to uncover the true meaning behind the phenomenon. Lastly, using the imaginative variation process, I evaluated the data from a new perspective.

Through this, I was able to establish a structured description of the data to support all identified themes from the study further. The individual interviews and the focus group sessions were initially transcribed through the Temi app. Once the initial transcriptions were completed, they were sent back to the participants to ensure the validity of the information for member-checking, as described by Moustakas (1994) and Creswell and Poth (2018). Once they were returned to me, I made necessary corrections as directed by the participants. This ensured I had all proper corrections to the transcriptions before I hand coded and input the dated through NVivo.

Following the individual interviews, all gathered data were analyzed through NVivo and hand coded to identify similar themes and descriptions from each participant. The use of NVivo helped manage my study and the findings which followed, as described by Paulus and Lester (2020). This was done in hopes of identifying similar descriptions throughout each interview to answer the established questions for the study. The data were then synthesized to appropriately organize it to identify similarities between each participant's lived experiences of social media use and how it could relate to their perceived happiness.

Focus Groups

According to Gill and Baillie (2018), using a focus group is to understand collective experiences, perspectives, attitudes, and behaviors. Marques et al., (2021) pointed out that focus

groups could be used for effectively exploring and understanding the participant's lived experiences. The purpose of using the focus group data collection approach was to gain insight into each specific group within the study, and their experiences from the group perspective. Allowing the participants to come together in their assigned groups fueled collaboration through the discussions.

There were two focus groups with the first focus group consisting of three participants and the second focus group consisting of five participants. There were two participants who were unable to attend either focus group due to scheduling conflicts. To ensure clarity and accuracy, online focus group discussions were audio and video recorded through Microsoft Teams to help document the interview with each group. Online focus groups were utilized for ease of access as they proved to be more cost-efficient and more accessible for members to participate in (Richard et al., 2021).

Focus Group Questions

1. What is your outlook on the world when you view positive content on social media platforms? (CRQ)

2. What is your outlook on the world when you view negative content on social media platforms? (CRQ)

3. What influence, if any, does social media have on your communication with others? (CRQ)

4. What influence, if any, does social media have on your behavior? (CRQ, SQ1, SQ2)

5. How do you describe your attitude before and after using social media? (CRQ, SQ1, SQ2)

6. What type of content is most frequent on your social media feeds? (CRQ, SQ1, SQ2)

The questions for the focus groups were asked to provide insight and answers to the established central and sub-questions for the study. Gill and Baillie (2018) mentioned establishing rapport before delving into the focus group questions. This was done before the focus group questions were asked to reestablish a connection with the participants. Questions one, two, three, four, five, and six were developed to focus on the central research question and provide insight into how the use of social media could relate to the perceived happiness of undergraduate students. Questions four, five, and six were specifically developed to focus on the first sub-question of how undergraduates' experiences with comparison relate to their perceived happiness. Lastly, questions four, five, and six focused on how undergraduates described their experiences of social comparison and how it relates to their social media use.

Focus Group Data Analysis Plan

Once all data was gathered from the focus groups, I began analyzing and developing the data using a phenomenological model explained by Moustakas (1994). First, I started with the epoché process to reflect meditatively on the data received. I wanted to view the data as if it were the first instance of viewing the phenomenon. This allowed for all preconceptions and judgments to be ignored, allowing my consciousness to flow freely, as Moustakas described. This enabled me to begin reflective journaling over the data gathered, allowing me to record further data without any personal experience or biases, providing the ability to record the information about myself throughout the data collection process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Next, I used the phenomenological two-step reduction process to understand the information for what it is (Moustakas, 1994). This method allowed me to see the participants' experiences through new eyes. I then bracketed the information into like themes, focusing solely on the research topic.

Moustakas highlighted the creative variation process, which allowed me to see possible meanings of the data through imagination, approaching the tropic through different perspectives.

Data Synthesis

The process used for data analysis purposes mimicked Moustakas' (1994) adaptation of Van Kaam's method of analysis, which focused on listing and grouping like themes into categories with equal values and significance, such as horizonalization. The three data methods were analyzed: journal entries, individual interviews, and focus group findings. I began the analysis through Moustakas' epoché method, allowing the researcher to view the information as if it were the first time. The data collected from the individual interviews and focus groups were categorized, hand-coded, and coded with NVivo into categories.

These themes and categories, highlighted through the data analysis, provided further insight into this research study. I then moved on to the phenomenological reduction two-step process, allowing me to truly understand the information for what it truly is (Moustakas, 1994). Once this had been completed, I began viewing the data through the imaginative variation process, allowing me to consider new meanings through imagination and view the information from new perspectives than previously. Lastly, once all the data was collected and analyzed, themes were developed to explain the phenomenon, which helped in answering the central research question and all sub-questions.

Trustworthiness

I ensured my research was trustworthy through its credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These foundational concepts, termed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), allowed my research to establish trustworthiness. Cloutier and Ravasi (2021) also pointed out how utilizing tables in qualitative research assists in proving the research's

trustworthiness by establishing a visual representation of the information gathered and analyzed. I then developed a table to better portray the horizonalization described by Moustakas (1994) through themes and categories that will explain the study's findings.

Credibility

One aspect of ensuring credibility within the study was to ensure approval at all levels, such as from the university or college review boards or even individuals at the research site (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To ensure credibility throughout the study, I provided all data received and analyzed was sent back to the participants for member-checking to properly ensure the validity of the information. Providing the participants' data allowed them the chance to validate the information before being hand-coded and analyzed with NVivo, and I was then able to ensure the credibility of all data received. Another method of credibility utilized was peer debriefing through maintaining communication with other doctoral students. Hadi and Closs (2016) explained that peer debriefing is when a researcher continuously discusses their research and findings with others not directly involved in the present study. Attaining a third-party review of this study further provided additional credibility upon completion.

Transferability

The thick descriptions found and documented throughout this study related directly to the themes developed from the three data collection methods. Tables were also developed to assist in expressing the proper themes of the study to build upon proper transferability. Using tables, I provided a rich contextual expression of information to build upon its trustworthiness and transferability to other potential settings (Cloutier & Ravasi, 2021). By establishing the thick descriptions being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018), I was able to create conditions for the reader to determine transferability.

Dependability

I maintained a detailed audit trail of all notes and recordings to show how the study was carried out and how conclusions were made to help ensure the credibility of all data collected (Carcary, 2020). Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated the need to establish an educational audit to ensure the dependability of the research. By identifying consistent themes through the analysis, I showed that the research was sound and dependable to the reader. Dependability was able to be established through a thorough inquiry audit and review of the processes of the study for the reader to determine.

Confirmability

Korstjens and Moser (2017) pointed out that confirmability is when researchers can confirm the study's data. This was accomplished through confirmability audits as described by Creswell and Poth (2018), where all data and findings were maintained and filed for ease of access and understanding for any future audit. I also allowed a qualified researcher to review my analysis to provide another form of accountability to establish rich detail and identify the themes' proper aspects (Patton, 2015). Lincoln and Guba (1985) discussed triangulation by comparing and contrasting the data through multiple collection methods. This was accomplished by comparing and contrasting all data collected from each method to identify the study's common or liked themes.

Ethical Considerations

To maintain a well-rounded and respectable research, I considered the following ethical guidelines throughout my study. I began by gaining IRB approval (See Appendix A: IRB Approval), which is one of the first steps to ensuring ethical research in a study (Workman et al., 2017). Following this, I ensured ethical guidelines in participant selection, provided each

participant with all pertinent information, and explained that there will be minimal risk during the study and that confidentiality was always maintained. I then provided them with an information sheet (See Appendix C: Information Sheet) for their participation in the study. I was also able to ensure that each participant understood the information sheet before beginning the study to confirm their willingness to participate.

This form provided them with the voluntary nature of the study, what would be expected of them throughout, and their rights to withdraw at any time. By doing this, I was able to ensure an ethically sound study where no participant was taken advantage of or misinterpreted. Regarding any of the data being provided by the participants, it was all secured for my eyes only on my password-protected laptop unless released by the appropriate participants. All data, recordings, and miscellaneous information was maintained for up to three years and then destroyed to ensure privacy rights.

Summary

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to understand how undergraduate students describe their experiences with social media and how it relates to their perceived happiness. Data were collected through journal entries, individual interviews, and focus groups. I was able to gather data supporting this study and conduct my analysis through methods including epoch, phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation. All data collected was categorized into liked themes to establish trustworthiness through horizonalization. All synthesized data was established to understand undergraduate students' further lived experiences using social media and how it relates to their perceived happiness.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to understand how undergraduate students describe their experiences with social media and how it relates to their perceived happiness. This chapter focuses on the participants, findings from the data analysis, and answers the prescribed research questions. Data were collected from participants utilizing journal prompts, interviews, and focus groups. The data were then hand-coded and coded through NVivo to identify similar themes to better interpret the data gathered. Reflective notes were maintained following each interview to reflect upon and to help ensure further insight. Themes were identified from the three data collection methods, which helps give meaning to the phenomenon of how social media use could relate to the perceived happiness of undergraduate students. Three themes were identified: the Purpose Behind Social Media Use, the Impacts of Social Media Use, and Unintentional Outcomes. Lastly, the findings and responses are also presented.

Participants

The participants gathered for this study included 10 undergraduate students residing within the United States who had firsthand experience using social media. Participants were selected using purposeful sampling to ensure each participant met the study's requirements. Participants were solicited through Facebook (see Appendix B). Recruiting participants became difficult due to age limitations and no compensation. Due to these difficulties, the study was modified to remove the age requirements and provide each participant compensation for their roles in the study. After receiving IRB approval with the modifications, I recruited the necessary participants for the study (see Appendix E: IRB Modification Letter).

Each participant was required to provide proof of residence in the United States and proof of current enrollment in an undergraduate course. These requirements were met by participants providing a current form of identification with personal information removed, showing only their face and name to ensure no personal identifiers were compromised. Participants provided proof of enrollment in terms of a picture of their enrollment showing their name to ensure they were actively enrolled in an undergraduate program. Once each participant verified, they met the eligibility criteria, I provided them with a journal prompt to complete. Then, an interview was scheduled with each participant through Microsoft Teams, being recorded. Once the desired number of participants were gathered, a focus group interview was scheduled and accomplished through Microsoft Teams. After each interview and focus group, a copy of the transcripts was sent to the respective participant for review and validation. For confidentiality, each participant was assigned a pseudonym. The following table illustrates the participant's information.

Table 1

Participant Information

#:	Name: (Pseudonym)	Gender	Ethnicity:	Focus Group #	Home State
P1	April	Female	African American	2	California
P2	Cami	Female	Caucasian	1	New Mexico
P3	Ember	Female	Hispanic	1	Kentucky
P4	Janet	Female	African American	1	Missouri
P5	Jimmy	Male	Caucasian	2	New Mexico
P6	Karen	Female	Hispanic	2	Wisconsin
P7	Sarah	Female	Caucasian	2	Pennsylvania
P8	Sean	Male	Caucasian	2	South Dakota

P9	Wallace	Male	Caucasian	N/A	Montana
P10	Sam	Male	Caucasian	N/A	Tennessee

April

April was a female undergraduate student, located in the western region of the United States, who loves to follow fashion and beauty on social media. April enjoys how social media can bring people together worldwide and how easy it is to learn through its use. During her interview, April stated, "I would say that social media is a great platform, you know, brings people all over the world together. I think that it's a mind-blowing idea, and I really appreciate it because it gives me the time to learn so much." April also mentioned throughout her journal prompt, interview, and even during her focus group how her use of social media benefits her, "Social media is very beneficial to me" as she continued discussing her use of it to learn and expand her knowledge.

Cami

Cami was a female undergraduate student located in the southwest region of the United States with a unique perspective on social media use. She noted on several occasions during her journal prompt, interview, and focus group how the use of social media may have been a factor in her depression during a difficult time in her life. In her interview, she stated, "I was very depressed, and I look and see like those memories that pop up." Cami also made it clear that she purposefully keeps the content she views on social media as positive as possible due to the effects it could have on her mental state. Cami explained, "If I come across something that irritates me, a news article that somebody else posts or things like that, then I usually tend to just get off because I just don't feel like listening to all the negativity."

Ember

Ember was a female undergraduate student in here early twenties, located in the east south-central region of the United States, who used social media relatively regularly and, in most cases, absentmindedly out of boredom, as she explained in her interview. Yet, she noted the effects viewing specific posts on social media could have on her. Ember explained in her interview, "Sometimes I feel a little bit insecure when I look at Instagram." As a young participant, Ember had grown up with social media readily available for as long as she can remember. Amber expressed that she spends most of her time on social media viewing lifestyle, fashion, beauty, and fitness content. She also shared opinions on how social media use relates to her life in multiple ways.

Janet

Janet was a female undergraduate student located in the midwestern region of the United States, who loved to use social media to meet and talk to new people. Janet mentioned during her interview, "I get information ranging from fashion to news stories, sports, beauty, health, and wellness. Another reason is getting to meet people online rather than being alone." For Janet, the attention she could garner through social media use was something she enjoyed. As she pointed out, she received immediate feedback when posting, commenting, or sharing content on social media. Janet also followed influencers for brands and beauty content that she enjoyed.

Jimmy

Jimmy was a male undergraduate student located in the southwestern region of the United States, who used social media to create content and strongly followed the fitness world on his social media platforms. He stated, "My main purpose with it is to kind of market a business that I'm trying to build, market just like some fitness online coaching stuff." As a follower of

fitness content, Jimmy understood how negative certain kinds of social media use, such as social comparison, could be on the viewer. He noted how it could negatively impact how he viewed himself and how he looked to others on social media platforms.

Karen

Karen was a female in here late thirties, located in the midwestern region of the United States who mainly used Facebook and Snapchat and avoided other social media platforms, such as TikTok. As opposed to the younger participants, Karen used social media for lifestyle, food-related content, homesteading, and couple relationship content. According to Karen, using social media could help build certain types of relationships, but it could prove detrimental to others. She stated, "So I think it can be beneficial in helping build some relationships, but also I think it can be...more detrimental to kind of your personal relationships, such as like your marital ones, especially with all these young couples that are married and they portray all the best things and not so much the hardships of it."

Sarah

Sarah was a female undergraduate student located in the midwestern region of the United States and was an avid social media user who used it to promote her business. As she mentioned during her journal prompt, Sarah tended to find happiness in social media use; she stated in her interview, "I find funny videos on TikTok that make me happy and tend to make me laugh." While some social media users would find it difficult not to have immediate access to these platforms, Sarah mentioned that it's "refreshing" when she does not have direct access to her social media platforms.

Sean

Sean was a male in his late thirties, located in the midwestern region of the United States, who mainly used social media to keep in touch with friends and family and keep updated on local events and happenings. Sean provided a unique perspective on his own experience using social media. He stated, "So social media platforms, for me, are a double-edged sword. I've been able to reconnect with many people I lost touch with using social media. And for what it's worth, it is good for a few chuckles here and there, but it is also a breeding ground for toxicity. It's a breeding ground for disrespect and ignorance." Sean also believed that social media should be used in moderation, as it could lead to too much potential negativity in one's life.

Wallace

Wallace was a male undergraduate student in his later thirties, located in the midwestern region of the United States who used social media to stay in touch with friends and family. He also enjoyed using social media to find do-it-yourself projects. He explained in his interview, "I can look them up a lot of DIY projects. I can get on there, get inspiration ideas and look up. Anything that pertains to cooking, farm work, yard work, housework, or anything like that." Wallace also noted during his interview and journal prompt that he felt he does not fully allow social media use to affect him as he does not "put all my heart and soul into it." He viewed social media as just a tool that is there for him to use to find new project ideas.

Sam

Sam was a male undergraduate student in his early twenties, located in the midwestern region of the United States who enjoyed using social media to connect with family and friends and pass work time. Sam also noted during his journal prompt a negative aspect that social media has had in his life. "I've found that most of my romantic relationships suffer in one way or

another because of social media." Sam enjoyed using social media to watch video games and cooking videos to help him try new recipes. He was another participant who felt that if he limited his time on social media, he may have been happier at times.

Results

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand how undergraduate students describe their experiences with social media and how it relates to their perceived happiness. The 10 undergraduate participants shared their unique experiences through journal prompts, individual interviews, and focus group interviews. Individual and focus group interviews were recorded and conducted through Microsoft Teams. I was able to transcribe the interviews through Microsoft Teams. Similarities among the participant's responses were noted through data analysis. During the analysis process, I began by bracketing any preconceptions through the epoché process and then separating the data into essential statements, each with its own meanings, to develop the identified codes and themes properly. I identified themes of thematic analysis, the themes of the Purpose Behind Social Media Use, Impacts of Social Media Use, and Unintentional Outcomes (see Table 2).

Table 2

Theme and Subthemes

Sub-theme	Keywords and Phrases
Theme 1: Purpose Behind Social Media Use	
Relationships	Family, space, friendship, relationships, partner, parents, conversation, professional

Connectedness	World, fitness, share, connect, communication, together, recommendations, entertainment, lifestyle, homesteading
Theme 2: Impacts of Social Media Use	
Bittersweet	Positive, negative, happy, sad, good, depressed, angry, bad, failures,
Emotional	Happy, feelings, uplifting, jealous, worth, trauma, optimistic, detrimental, anxiety, failures, depression
Theme 3: Unintentional Outcomes	
Social Comparison	Comparing, celebrities, beauty, aspire, admire, subconsciously, influences, celebrities, observation
Emotional Influences	Conscious, perception, nervousness, anxiety, self-conscious, cranky, angry, addicted, mood, sub-conscious

Purpose Behind Social Media Use

All 10 participants discussed their unique use of social media in their journal prompts, interviews, and focus group sessions. The purpose behind social media use varied between participants. While similarities were present, it appeared each participant had their own experiences and desires in their use of social media, ranging from relationships to maintaining connectedness with the world around them. It was noted that nine out of 10 participants mentioned their use of social media involved using it to stay in touch with friends and family. During Sarah's interview, she stated she "uses Facebook and stuff to catch up with family, but

other than that, I'd use it just for fun. It is a good way to spread business. So I use Facebook to spread information about my dog training business." At the same time, April described in her journal prompt that she used social media to follow fashion, beauty and brand, including content. During Sarah's focus group interview, she explained how she uses social media to watch videos to help boost her mood.

Relationships

A strong purpose behind participants social media use was the ability to stay in touch with family and friends and to strengthen or build current and new relationships. Seven out of 10 participants mentioned the benefits of relationships through social media use. During Sean's interview, he stated, "I've been able to reconnect with a lot of people that I lost touch with using social media." Karen stated, "Social media makes it easier to stay in touch with people helping to keep relationships with people I may have lost." Karen described during her focus group that she used social media to stay in touch with family and long-lost friends.

Jimmy explained in his journal prompt that using social media has benefited most of his relationships at home and abroad. However, he noted, "It can be a hindrance with my wife and kids since that time should be spent with them." Sam stated, "It's a good way to connect with people, friends, and family." He described how most of his romantic relationships have suffered because of social media. Ember described her experience with social media by stating, "I think it makes it easier to have less genuine relationships, as being Instagram *friends* with someone really isn't a true friendship, but people my age have kind of normalized the idea of it being a real, genuine friendship."

Connectedness

Six out of 10 participants mentioned feelings of connectedness in their journal prompt or during their interviews and focus group sessions while they used social media platforms. April stated in her interview how she learned to build connections and friendships while being able to learn new things she never had a chance to learn previously. Cami described how she enjoyed using social media as an online student because it allowed her to connect with other students worldwide. Feelings of connectedness, whether with family or friends or promoting hobbies or businesses, were seen throughout the data analysis.

Cami described in her journal prompt that, "I am also a avid motorcyclist so most of my feed is about motorcycles and specifically female riders. It helps me network and help new female riders in my state connect with others." The use of social media also provided support in ways of connectedness for some participants. Janet said, "I get connected with my loved ones and find resources and support through social media." She continued, "Social media bridges the gap of long distances relationship. No matter where my loved ones are, we get connected through social media and not feel rather alone. It helps facilitate quality time and bonding and promotes realistic expectations." However, Janet also mentioned in her focus group that she felt disconnected from the world when she does not have direct access to social media.

Impacts of Social Media Use

The impact of social media use was prevalent, although convoluted, in that each participant had different experiences while using social media platforms. The participants' use of social media translated into different impacts, which were dependent upon the social media user. Cami explained during her focus group how social media use sometimes made her feel cranky, "I don't know, almost like cranky because I'm just staring at my phone forever sitting there doing nothing." During Sean's interview he explained that he would sometimes feel irritated when

using social media, and he realized he needed to "to watch carefully what it is that you're reading on there, because it can have a pretty drastic effect on your psyche, even if you don't immediately recognize it." Ember described in her journal prompt how she felt when she does not have immediate access to her social media: "When I instead delete social media or just don't think about it, I am much better able to live in the moment and just be grateful for what I have."

Bittersweet.

Participant's experiences when using social media appeared to be bittersweet in nature due to the positive and negative impacts it had on them while using social media. During Cami's focus group interview, she gave one example of when she views positive content from family, friends, or influencers:

> I also feel like seeing a lot of positive will just kind of remind me that the world is still a really good place and that they're still really good people out there, so that it would remind me to kind of do my part in following the same type of thing.

Jimmy stated during his focus group, regarding the content he views, "the positive light helps bolster some positivity." During Janet's focus group, she mentioned that when she viewed positive content on social media, it would give her a push to strive toward a new goal.

On the other hand, Janet pointed out in her journal prompt, "No doubt that social media content excites me, but when it comes to content about death and gory news, I find it really upsetting." When viewing negative content on social media, Sarah described in her interview how it alters her views of the world around her:

> When I see negative, I just think that every single thing is negative, and it's like you have no faith in humanity, especially depending on like what I'm looking at like, if it's a really violent crime or anything like that.

Sam described in his interview that he tended to feel sad when he saw individuals on social media accomplishing things he has not yet accomplished. These continued back and forth feelings from positive to negative based on the type of content the social media user spends their time viewing relate directly to the bittersweet nature of social media use as a whole.

Emotional

The emotional impact of social media use on each participant differed based on their experiences using social media. Cami recollected during her focus group a time in her life when she was heavily involved in social media use. "I was probably like feeding into my depression and it was just like I was unfocused, not getting anything done." The emotional impact of social media use became more prevalent during the analysis process. April expressed her feelings on the matter in her journal prompt, saying she felt frustrated and hindered from accomplishing something. She continued, "When we let this content get into our heads, it kind of wears down our happiness and gives us some sort of pressure." During her interview, when asked how she felt after using social media, Karen stated, "Usually bored, jealous, rethink my life choices." She then mentioned how the content she viewed would sometimes put a "pep in her step" to begin reaching for a new goal.

This type of impact on the participants' emotions showed how social media use could be a hindrance or a motivating factor in their lives. In her focus group, Kim stated, "Facebook and other stuff usually puts me in a bad mood. If I spend too much time on it, or if I'm just like obsessively scrolling because I just get so annoyed with it." The type of content being viewed by the participants was noted to impact them directly, as April stated in her interview, "A time I viewed a content that got me angry was when someone was calling out black American's that we use racism as a form of pity party, and I was really upset because that's not true."

Cami explained a positive lesson she had learned over years of social media use, such as allowing social media use to be what gives her a chance to unwind after a hectic day. In her focus group, Ember explained that viewing positive content will provide her with "an optimistic outlook in like regular life, not just on social media." Sarah described in her journal prompts, "Often times I find funny videos on TikTok that make me happy and tend to make me laugh." Positive aspects of social media use, such as the type of content viewed, increased social media users' perceived happiness.

Unintentional Outcomes

Unintentional outcomes emerged based on social media use, such as social comparison and behavioral influences. All 10 participants noted instances where they experienced involuntary effects of their social media use. Jimmy noted in his focus group that he realized that "if I see something that kind of interests me or something, it'll basically make me dive into more like research or ask more questions." Jimmy's revelation showed how he was encouraged to investigate previous and new interests through social media. During Janet's interview, she stated, "Social media has a such a big influence on our lives consciously and subconsciously," which would lead her to wanting the newest beauty products or follow the most popular fashion trend. The use of social media was seen through the eyes of the participants' experiences of social comparison and behavioral influences. April went on to describe in her journal prompt how she felt when she did not have immediate access to her social media platforms, "I feel so frustrated. I feel like I am being hindered."

Social Comparison

Each participant noted occasions in which they found themselves comparing social media users, posts, and content to their own lives. Wallace stated in his interview:

So if I spend the time and compare myself and try to get to somebody else's level, we'll take, for instance, Instagram or Facebook where people are posting about making this much money and or driving these fancy cars or buying these fancy houses. And if I sit there and I try to compare myself to it, knowing that I... won't get to that level, then I'm striving for the wrong thing, and I won't be happy.

Social media is filled with users posting their lives for all to see, sometimes affecting other social media users absentmindedly. In her journal prompt, Ember wrote about her experience, "Sometimes I try to compare myself with them or with my friends, when I see them post something beautiful." She continued by describing how it could make her feel happy for her friends or family, but also feel like she was not meeting her own expectations. Each participant noted specific moments where social media use had impacted their life.

Sean understands the impact social media can have as far as comparing oneself to others' lives:

I think it's very easy for us as human beings to try to keep up with the Joneses, so to speak. So, if I see one of my friends taking a vacation going somewhere nice and warm when I'm stuck here in the frozen tundra, can be a little bit disheartening.

Each participant was noted to discuss social comparison directly through social media platforms. "I just want to be like most of these people," April stated when talking about her opinion of social media content. Ember also explained in her focus group interview how she felt "a bit insecure when I look at Instagram." She noted how some content is untrustworthy due to people using Photoshop to alter appearances.

Emotional Influences

Emotional influences were seen throughout all participants use of social media. When asked about how the use of social media may influence them, most participants stated ways, such as making them happy, sad, angry, anxious, and even self-conscious, when out in public. According to Jimmy, in his focus group, "I feel like sometimes too, a lot of the content that I watch, it kind of influences the way that I behave." When asked to describe times when social media use influenced her behavior, Sarah stated, "Viral trends on TikTok are usually the only things that influence." The influences social media can have on its users are even described as conscious and sub-conscious, as mentioned by Janet in her interview: "Social media has a such a big influence on our lives consciously and subconsciously."

Karen mentioned that viewing relationship content made her feel jealous sometimes because it made her wonder why her husband is not doing what she sees others do on social media. April then explained in her journal prompt how social media makes her want to be like people she sees and follows on her social media platforms: "Okay, for me, I admire them. I just want to be like them. I just, by a moment, I feel I could be very emotional, you know, I could just say, yeah, someday I'll be like this." Sarah then described how upset and angry she gets when her social media feed changes from funny to political content. Feelings of annoyance, anger, jealousy, and aspirations all derived from the participant's use of social media and how it has sometimes directly influenced their emotions. However, it is not always a negative emotional influence on the participant, as Janet stated in her interview, "So sometimes following these people gives me some sort of motivation, gives me some sort of courage that I could be anything."

Research Question Responses

One central research question and two sub-questions guided this transcendental phenomenological study, focusing on how social media use relates to the perceived happiness of undergraduate students. This section offers concise answers to the highlighted research questions earlier in the study. Each research question is answered with direct quotes from the participants from their journal prompts, interviews, and focus groups.

Central Research Question

The central research question was: How do undergraduate students describe their lived experiences with social media related to their perceived happiness? Participants identified the purpose and impact behind their social media use and how it affected their perceived happiness in positive and negative ways. During his focus group, Sean said, "When I see something on social media that's positive, helpful, and informative, it really makes me feel good." In her focus group, Kim described how viewing positive content on social media made her feel: "I find it kind of uplifting to see the positive aspects in the world." As the study progressed, it became apparent that each participant collaborated on how the use of social media related to their happiness, positively or negatively.

During her interview, Cami mentioned how she felt after using social media: "Usually pretty good. I find things that make me laugh or find funny things, or I get really like energetic with like my crochet things, because I'll find new patterns and I'm like, oh, I want to try making this and then I'll use it to find the video I need to make it or something like that. So I'm like, I would say like, 80% of the time, I'm pretty happy." Ember described a time she was unhappy after viewing a weight loss post on social media that promoted unhealthy standards for women. She felt like it was a betrayal, making her angry and sad. The answer to the central research

question was that there is a relationship between social media use and the perceived happiness of undergraduate students, which was seen through the type of content viewed and the time spent on social media by the participants.

Sub-Question One

The first sub-question was: How do undergraduate students describe their lived experiences with social comparison as it relates to their perceived happiness? Undergraduate students' emotions were influenced based on the type of content they spent most of their time viewing. Social comparison was discussed by all 10 participants during the data collection process, as they often described themselves comparing their lives to those they see. They noted how social comparison equally related to their perceived happiness dependent on the type of content they spent the majority of their time viewing, whether it was what they perceived as positive or negative in nature. During her interview, Ember said, "I think when I compare myself and I'm a little bit less happy with or like less concerned with what I have so it just Leaves me to constantly want like the newest beauty product or clothing or feel insecure my body." During Jimmy's interview, he pointed out that he even gets caught up comparing himself to others on social media: "I sometimes get caught up into, but it takes away from your own personal... satisfaction." Social comparison was a cornerstone of each participant's experiences using social media.

Cami stated during her interview, "A lot of people like post to compare themselves or to prove themselves or to try to be better than somebody they have in their life." It was identified that each participant in the study experienced social comparison. Wallace corroborated by stating during his interview:

So if I spend the time and compare myself and try to get to somebody else's level, we'll take for instance, Instagram or Facebook where people are posting about making this much money and or driving these fancy cars or buying these fancy houses. And if I sit there and I try to compare myself to it, knowing that I... won't get to that level, then I'm striving for the wrong thing, and I won't be happy.

Sub-Question Two

The second sub-question was: How do undergraduate students describe their lived experiences with social comparison as it relates to their social media use? As seen through Festinger's theory, participants tended to base their own personal value on the type of content they spent most of their time viewing. During the analysis process, participants discussed social comparison while using social media, such as comparing their lives with those of friends or families viewed on social media. Sean mentioned during his interview how he compares his life to friends he sees on social media:

I think it's very easy for us as human beings to try to keep up with the Joneses, so to speak. So, if I see one of my friends taking a vacation going somewhere nice and warm when I'm stuck here in the frozen tundra, can be a little bit disheartening."

The data showed equal relations between the use of social media and social comparison by each participant in the study.

Social comparison on social media platforms did not always result in a negative factor. Janet described her experiences with social comparison while using social media platforms: "So sometimes following these people gives me some sort of motivation, gives me some sort of courage that I could be anything, I could do anything I want to do, I could achieve whatever I want to achieve." Social comparisons related to the social media use of the participants in this

study were unique in that each had their own experiences that set them apart from others. The time participants spent on social media, who they followed, and how they found themselves comparing their lives to those on social media platforms provided rich insight into their lives.

Karen described during her interview how viewing certain content on social media could lead to some negative effects due to comparisons. "So I think it can be beneficial in helping build some relationships, but also I think it can be...more detrimental to kind of your personal relationships, such as like your marital ones, especially with all these young couples that are married and they portray all the best things and not so much the hardships of it." It was noted that 7 out of 10 participants directly discussed how social comparison on social media related to their experiences. April described during her interview how viewing certain content on social media made her feel inspired in ways that made her want to be like those she viewed.

Summary

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand how undergraduate students described their experiences with social media and how it related to their perceived happiness. Through journal prompts, interviews, and focus groups, the themes identified were the purpose of social media use, the impact of social media use, and unintentional outcomes. The first main theme revealed two subthemes of relationships and connectedness. The second theme revealed two sub-themes, bittersweet and emotional. Lastly, the third theme had two sub-themes: social comparison and emotional influences. The identified themes and sub-themes aligned with the study's central and sub-questions, by explaining how the use of social media related to undergraduates perceived happiness equally dependent on if they spent their time majorly viewing positive or negative content.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to understand how undergraduate students describe their experiences with social media and how it relates to their perceived happiness. Chapter Five contains the interpretation of findings discovered during the data analysis and the summary of thematic findings. Implications for policy and practice and theoretical and methodological implications are also discussed. The limitations and delimitations are identified, closing with recommendations for future research. This chapter concludes with a summary of this study.

Discussion

This section discusses the research findings pertaining to the themes discovered during the data analysis process. The findings of this research study highlighted the development of the themes that emerged from analyzing the experiences of the 10 participants who used social media. This study utilized the lens of social comparison to interpret the undergraduate participants' use of social media. This section first discusses the interpretation of the findings. The implications for policy and practice and the theoretical and empirical implications are then discussed. Lastly, the limitations, delimitations, and recommendations for future research are identified.

Interpretation of Findings

Participants in this study shared equal enthusiasm in sharing their lived experiences with social media use. Data for this study was collected using journal prompts, individual interviews, and focus groups. Three themes were identified during the data analysis: Purpose Behind Social Media Use, Impacts of Social Media Use, and Unintentional Outcomes.

Summary of Thematic Findings

The summary of the thematic findings in this study provides a brief discussion to highlight the significant findings and interpretations I identified throughout the study. The study's findings include the identified themes and sub-themes singular to the participant's lived experiences with social media use. The first theme, the purpose behind social media use, included two sub-themes: relationships and connectedness. The second theme, the impacts of social media use, contained bittersweet and emotional sub-themes. The final theme, unintentional outcomes, contained two sub-themes: social comparison and behavioral influences.

The interpretation of the data gathered explained the phenomenon of undergraduate students' social media use and how it related to their perceived happiness. The interpretations of these findings include social media use and its impact, including social media influences. Ensuring the research and data were bracketed out ensured that personal biases were not a factor during the data analysis. As Moustakas (1994) described, transcendental phenomenology is the process where the researcher works towards an unbiased description of the collected data.

Social Media Use. The data indicated that participants used social media to follow current fashion trends, beauty products, and to view content related to their personal businesses, such as Sarah's dog training. Janet stated in her interview that she used social media to meet people online, so she is not lonely. According to Pittman & Reigh (2016) the use of image-based platforms like Snapchat or Instagram led to a significant decrease in reported loneliness. During her interview, Sarah noted she used social media primarily to view "stuff that I like or interact with more, so dog stuff usually vacation planning, organization, anything that I really like." Undergraduate students indulging in social media should be mindful of the content they consistently view, as it may have some adverse effects, such as depression, through the use of

Facebook, as pointed out by Berryman et al. (2018). In his interview, Sam described how, when he sees friends and families success's on social media, that he is "sad that I'm not accomplishing the same thing someone else is." Viewing positive posts may positively affect social media users' perceived happiness. Sean provided one such example when he viewed positive content and the impact it had on him during his interview:

> One instance that stands out is being able to see newborn pics of my nephew. While it would have been better to see in-person, seeing pictures of him when he was just brought into this world really lifted my spirits.

> Similarly, Cami described a time when she found herself in a depressing time of her life where the use of social media only hindered her happiness:

> I was in a very abusive relationship. I was in a very toxic relationship. Umm, I was very depressed and I look and see like those memories that pop up and I'm like, why the heck would I post that? Because it was very like attention grabbing, it was very like trying to get somebody to comment or reach out or pay date, you know, say something to me.

> Cami's example showed a direct example of downward comparison as described by Cheng et al. (2021), where she viewed content on social media and compared herself to it in a negative way, leading to increased depression in her life. By understanding the impact this type of content could have on undergraduate students, they could begin controlling their views with a more open mind. The participants usually catered the type of content they viewed to more positive content due to its impact on them during specific points in their lives.

Social Media Influences. The type of content social media users viewed influenced the participant's happiness, moods, and mental health (Coyne et al., 2020). The participants described occasions in which the content they viewed, such as fitness and food videos,

influenced them to follow that type of content and apply it to their lives, as reinforced by a study conducted by Zhuravskaya et al. (2020), which described social media content influences the social media user. Ember described a time she allowed a perceived negative situation to influence her while viewing social media content: "When I saw a weight loss video promoting unhealthy standards for teenage girls. It was sad and made me feel insecure, even though I logically knew the standards promoted were unrealistic." Alves de Castro et al. (2021) noted how social media influencers caused dissatisfied feelings in body image for the female viewer, including unrealistic and unhealthy male body images being portrayed.

During her interview, April mentioned when she was influenced to follow certain types of content on social media, such as fashion, beauty, and fitness: "I feel like it's more profitable to follow them because you learn from them." Three out of the 10 participants described their desire to follow beauty and fashion influencers on social media, leading them to want to be like those they saw. This included wanting the most desirable clothing and makeup based on whom they viewed portraying those products on their social media platforms. April gave an example of a social media influence she experienced:

> I was having acne at the time, I had several recommendations from various sources. I came across a post from a big-time influencer talking about acne and what specific cream to use. I was so happy. I used it and it did help me.

All the participants noted fitness, celebrities, beauty, fashion, and food content as influential factors in their lives throughout the study. Three participants described how viewing fitness content was a motivational factor that helped them reach new life goals. This showed a clear example of upward comparison, as described by Cheng et al. (2021), where participants used the content they viewed and compared themselves to it positively to reach new goals in life.

These motivational factors positively influenced the participant's lives, as they allowed them the proper guidance to experience new things that previously may have been unattainable. However, not all participants experienced these influences the same way as others.

Jimmy described a time when he became frustrated due to the influences he saw on social media: "I particularly remember was when someone who was claiming to be a natural athlete (meaning no performance enhancing drugs) was then outed as using performance enhancing drugs." Four out of the 10 participants expressed depression, sadness, and even anger as they viewed certain beauty, health, and fitness content from specific influencers on their social media platforms. These negative emotions were limiting factors in these participants lives, as they realized the type of content they viewed related to their perceived happiness. Situations in which anxiety and depression are seen through the use of social media continue to be negative concerns for those who use social media regularly (Abaido, 2020). However, even these negative influences held a hint of positive influence in the participants lives, as they could learn from these situations and better themselves.

Implications for Policy or Practice

The findings of this transcendental phenomenological study highlighted each participant's lived experiences with social media and its relation to their perceived happiness. Educational members, faculty, staff, and students could use the findings from this study to benefit themselves and future research. Discussed below are the implications for policy and practice. Support for these interpretations is identified through participants quotations received during the data collection.

Implications for Policy

Each participant noted specific situations related to their perceived happiness in either a negative or a positive manner when using social media. Institutions should be knowledgeable about how the use of social media could relate to their student's perceived happiness in both positive and negative ways. Each institution could develop an awareness campaign, class, or brochure for each student before beginning their course(s), highlighting the benefits and dangers of social media use. Highlighting risks, such as misinformation, cyberbullying, and social media influences, could provide students with a basic level of awareness they may not have had previously. Through policy implementations, students may become more knowledgeable of social media's potential impacts on their perceived happiness.

Implications for Practice

The experiences of the participants in this study may provide insight for anyone interested in understanding the phenomenon of social media use and how it relates to their perceived happiness. As undergraduate students may become leaders in academia and other prominent areas of society, it is vital to understand their experiences to implement new practices for the benefit of current and future generations. Undergraduate students could benefit from limiting the amount of time they spend on social media. This could negatively impact their perceived happiness as they spend less time on social media platforms engaging with positive and negative content. Current and future educators may also benefit from further researching and understanding the effects of social media use on perceived happiness in order to provide a thorough understanding of the potential risks of social media use to their student body.

Participants in this study reported that the positive and negative content they viewed directly influenced their perceived happiness and how they viewed the world through its influences. Students could also benefit from understanding how viewing specific social media

content could impact their emotional well-being. These factors alone may also lead social media users to limit their time on their platforms to avoid influential content that could adversely impact their well-being.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

This research study revealed both theoretical and empirical implications. Theoretical implications in this research have confirmed the theory of social comparison and its relation to social media. Empirical implications are based on the researcher's knowledge and the implications derived from what was observed through the research. Both the theoretical and empirical implications emerged through the lived experiences of each participant in this research study.

Theoretical Implications

Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory provided this study's theoretical foundation. Festinger described his social comparison theory as one person comparing themselves to others. The findings throughout this study confirm Festinger's theory of social comparison, as participants viewed family, friends, and strangers' content on social media and, in turn, compared their lives to those they viewed. Through social comparison and viewing specific types of content on social media, it was seen that participants perceived happiness was affected.

The Need to be Like Others. Festinger's theory of social comparison (1954) was seen as participants noted instances where they compared themselves to those they viewed on their social media platforms in both an upward and downward manner. The social comparison theory focuses on how people will compare themselves to others they see. In the case of this study, participants compared themselves with their friends and families they viewed on social media. Three out of the 10 participants expressed a downward comparison in the study. Sam noted in his

interview, "If all you see is someone having what you perceive as the perfect life and whatnot, it kind of just downplays how your life is going." Through viewing content on social media, participants found themselves purposely or inadvertently comparing themselves to those they viewed on social media in either an upward or downward comparison. In her interview, Janet noted that she compared herself to people she follows on social media, "Sometimes I try to compare myself with them or with my friends when I see them post something beautiful." In Janet's example, this was seen as an upward comparison, as she used this specific situation to readjust her life goals. The need to be like others viewed on social media platforms, such as friends, influencers, family, and others, was heavily seen throughout the study.

Empirical Implications

Empirical implications were evident throughout the study through journal prompts and the first-hand experiences of the participants during their interviews and focus group sessions. The findings from this study correlated with Festinger's theory (1954) that individuals compare themselves to those they see around them. Beyens et al. (2020) noted studies describing social media use relating to the well-being of social media users, such as their life satisfaction and depression. Wallace described a moment of happiness and influence while spending time on social media. "A time that reviewing social media made me happy is seeing photos stuff come up and gets my memory to relive the moment. Along with this seeing that other people have aspired to complete/achieve a goal." This study contributed to the literature concerning the phenomenon of social media use and identified a literature gap concerning the specific relations to undergraduates' perceived happiness related to their social media use. Previous researchers mentioned how the use of social media could affect social media users' happiness and well-being

(Avom & Malah., 2022; Valkenburg, 2022); however, this research narrows the focus of study to just undergraduate students, providing a more focused view on the impacts of social media use.

This study identified how undergraduate students viewed certain content, such as fitness, fashion, lifestyle, and cooking, related to their perceived happiness through the social comparison theory. Sarah stated in her focus group, "When I see negative, I just think that every single thing is negative." Ember also described in her journal prompt what she perceived as positive content and its impact on her through upward comparison. "When I got to see my little sister's homecoming pictures on Instagram! It was nice to see her with her friends, as I was living away from home and hadn't seen the pictures." Seabrook et al. (2016) described how the use of social media could directly link to the social media users well-being.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations in this study were identified as potential weaknesses found during and after the research that could not be controlled, as described by Akanle et al. (2020). While three limitations were identified throughout this study, one limitation was the broad age range of the participants. During the recruitment process, an age range between 18 and 30 years of age was initially planned to be maintained for participants. The age range was attempted to ensure that each participant had a relatively equal experience with social media use. This proved challenging to maintain, and due to this limitation, a modification to include all age ranges was necessary.

A second limitation was the hope to include an equal number of male and female participants, as this study included six females and four males. This was desired to ensure equal representation for both male and female participants. However, due to recruitment hindrances, it became unlikely. A third limitation was during the focus group sessions. During the first focus group session, five participants were invited to participate. However, only three could attend.

This limited the quality of the group discussion because only three participants in the first focus group were available to respond to the questions. The second group was noted as having more significant discussions because of the increased participant size.

Coker (2022) defined delimitations as factors that the research includes or excludes to manage and focus on the research questions. The delimitations of the study were established to ensure the study's settings, scope, and parameters were established as described by Akanle et al. (2020). The first delimitation was to gather participants through the use of Facebook recruitment. This was done to ensure that each participant gathered had direct experiences with social media. Additionally, participants were required to be at least 18 years of age and an undergraduate student residing in the United States. This decision ensured that each participant resided in the country as the researcher in an attempt to limit language barriers during the data collection process. Finally, I decided to conduct a transcendental phenomenological study because I wanted to understand the participants' lived experiences.

Recommendations for Future Research

Considering this study's findings, limitations, and delimitations, future studies could be conducted to further understand social media's impact on its users, such as the amount of time they spend viewing positive or negative content. Venegas-Vera et al. (2020) noted that while social media use can be positive, there are also negative impacts, such as the swift sharing of misinformation. This study only included undergraduate students within the United States who were at least 18 years of age. Future studies could be conducted using undergraduate participants from other countries and those residing in the United States. This could be done to gain further perspectives and experiences from social media users across the globe.

A second recommendation would be to study those who choose not to use social media. This type of study could provide a unique contrast in understanding the impact of social media use and its relation to the perceived happiness between those who use social media and those who do not. The last recommendation for research would be a quantitative study involving undergraduates' use of social media and its relation to their perceived happiness. This type of research could establish numerical data associated with specific values to measure the use of social media and its relation to undergraduate students' perceived happiness. This research method could provide rich data through statistical and numerical research.

Conclusion

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand how undergraduate students described their experiences with social media and how it related to their perceived happiness. This research focused on the following research questions: How do undergraduate students describe their lived experiences with social media as it relates to their perceived happiness? How do undergraduate students describe their lived experiences with social comparison as it relates to their perceived happiness? How do undergraduate students describe their lived experiences with social comparison as it relates to their social media use? The data were gathered through journal prompts, individual interviews, and focus groups. Three major themes were identified during the data analysis: the purpose behind social media use, the impacts of social media use, and unintentional outcomes.

The theory that guided this study was Leon Festinger's theory of social comparison. Findings corroborated Festinger's social comparison theory as participants compared themselves to those they viewed on social media, dependent on the time spent engaging with positive and negative content. The primary findings in this study showed that the time spent viewing negative

content impacted the participants' perceived happiness. Similarly, the time spent viewing

positive content on social media was seen to have a more positive impact on the perceived

happiness of the participants. This study provided insight into the lived experiences of

undergraduate students and how and why the use of social media related to their perceived

happiness.

References

Abaido, G. M. (2020). Cyberbullying on social media platforms among university students in the
United Arab Emirates. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, *25*(1), 407-420.

Abbas, J., Aman, J., Nurunnabi, M., & Bano, S. (2019). The influence of social media on
learning behavior for sustainable education: Evidence of students from selected
universities in Pakistan. *Sustainability*, *11*(6), 1683.

Abi-Jaoude, E., Naylor, K. T., & Pignatiello, A. (2020). Smartphones, social media use and
youth mental health. *Cmaj*, *192*(6), E136-E141.

Akanle, O., Ademuson, A. O., & Shittu, O. S. (2020). Scope and limitation of study in social
research. *Contemporary Issues in Social Research*, 105-114.

Akram, W., & Kumar, R. (2017). A study on positive and negative effects of social media on
society. *International Journal of Computer Sciences and Engineering*, *5*(10), 351–354.
https://doi.org/10.26438/ijcse/v5i10.351354

Allred, R. J., & Atkin, D. (2020). Cell phone addiction, anxiety, and willingness to communicate
in face-to-face encounters. *Communication Reports*, *33*(3), 95-106.

Alt, D. (2018). Students' wellbeing, fear of missing out, and social media engagement for leisure
in higher education learning environments. *Current Psychology*, *37*(1), 128+.
https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A530489133/BIC?u=vic_Koff&sid=summon&xid=3b366
c89

Althoff, T., Jindal, P., & Leskovec, J. (2017). Online actions with offline influence: How online
social networks influence online and offline user behavior. *Proceedings of the Tenth
ACM International Conference on Web Search and Data Mining* (pp. 537-546).

Alves de Castro, C., O'Reilly Dr, I., & Carthy, A. (2021). Social media influencers (SMIs) in context: A literature review.

Amati, V., Meggiolaro, S., Rivellini, G., & Zaccarin, S. (2018). Social relations and life satisfaction: The role of friends. *Genus*, *74*(1), 1-18.

Anderson, M., & Jiang, J. (2018). Teens, social media & technology 2018. *Pew Research Center*, *31*(2018), 1673-1689.

Ansari, J. A. N., & Khan, N. A. (2020). Exploring the role of social media in collaborative learning the new domain of learning. *Smart Learning Environments*, *7*(1), 1-16.

Antaramian, S. (2017). The importance of very high life satisfaction for students' academic success. *Cogent Education*, *4*(1), 1307622.

Arampatzi, E., Burger, M. J., & Novik, N. (2018). Social network sites, individual social capital and happiness. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, *19*, 99-122.

Asibong, U., Okafor, C. J., Asibong, I., Ayi, E., Omoronyia, O., & Owoidoho, U. (2020). Psychological distress and social media usage: A survey among undergraduates of a university in Calabar, Nigeria. *Nigerian Postgraduate Medical Journal*, *27*(2), 115.

Asvio, N. (2022). The influence of learning motivation and learning environment on undergraduate students' learning achievement of management of Islamic education, study program of IAIN Batusangkar In 2016.

Appel, H., Gerlach, A. L., & Crusius, J. (2016). The interplay between Facebook use, social comparison, envy, and depression. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, *9*, 44–49. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2015.10.006

Auxier, B., & Anderson, M. (2021). Social media use in 2021. *Pew Research Center*, *1*, 1-4.

Avom, D., & Malah, F. Y. (2022). Social media and happiness nexus in the millennial generation. *Telecommunications Policy*, *46*(8), 102368.

Balakrishnan, V., & Gan, C. L. (2016). Students' learning styles and their effects on the use of social media technology for learning. Telematics and Informatics, 33(3), 808-821.

Baldwin, M., & Mussweiler, T. (2018). The culture of social comparison. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *115*(39). https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1721555115

Baltaci, N. (2019). The predictive relationships between the social media addiction and social anxiety, loneliness, and happiness. *International Journal of Progressive Education*, *15*(4), 73–82. https://doi.org/10.29329/ijpe.2019.203.6

Baker, Z. G., Krieger, H., & LeRoy, A. S. (2016). Fear of missing out: Relationships with depression, mindfulness, and physical symptoms. *Translational Issues in Psychological Science*, *2*(3), 275.

Baturay, M. H., & Toker, S. (2019). Internet addiction among college students: Some causes and effects. *Education and Information Technologies*, *24*(5), 2863-2885.

Berezan, O., Krishen, A. S., Agarwal, S., & Kachroo, P. (2018). The pursuit of virtual happiness: Exploring the social media experience across generations. *Journal of Business Research*, *89*, 455–461. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2017.11.038

Berry, N., Emsley, R., Lobban, F., & Bucci, S. (2018). Social media and its relationship with mood, self-esteem, and paranoia in psychosis. *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica*, *138*(6), 558-570.

Berry, S. (2018). Building community in an online graduate program: Exploring the role of an in-person orientation. *The Qualitative Report*, *23*(7), 1673-1687.

Berryman, C., Ferguson, C. J., & Negy, C. (2018). Social media use and mental health among young adults. *Psychiatric Quarterly, 89*(2), 307-314. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11126-017-9535-6

Beyens, I., Pouwels, J. L., van Driel, I. I., Keijsers, L., & Valkenburg, P. M. (2020). The effect of social media on well-being differs from adolescent to adolescent. *Scientific Reports*, *10*(1). https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-020-67727-7

Biswas-Diener, R., & Wiese, C. W. (2018). Optimal levels of happiness. *Handbook of Well-Being. Salt Lake City, UT: DEF Publishers*.

Błachnio, A., & Przepiórka, A. (2018). Facebook intrusion, fear of missing out, narcissism, and life satisfaction: A cross-sectional study. *Psychiatry Research*, *259*, 514-519.

Brake, D. R. (2016). Shaping the 'me' in MySpace: The framing of profiles on a social network site.

Brooks, S. (2015). Does personal social media usage affect efficiency and well-being? *Computers in Human Behavior*, *46*, 26–37. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2014.12.053

Burbules, N. C. (2016). How we use and are used by social media in education. *Educational Theory*, *66*(4), 551-565.

Burger, K., & Samuel, R. (2017). The role of perceived stress and self-efficacy in young people's life satisfaction: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *46*(1), 78-90.

Buunk, A. P., & Gibbons, F. X. (2007). Social comparison: The end of a theory and the emergence of a field. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, *102*(1), 3–21. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2006.09.007

Carcary, M. (2020). The research audit trail: Methodological guidance for application in practice. *Electronic Journal of Business Research Methods*, *18*(2), pp166-177.

Carr, C. T., & Hayes, R. A. (2015). Social media: Defining, developing, and divining. *Atlantic Journal of Communication*, *23*(1), 46-65.

Cawsey, T., & Rowley, J. (2016). Social media brand building strategies in B2B companies. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*.

Chae, J. (2018). Reexamining the relationship between social media and happiness: The effects of various social media platforms on reconceptualized happiness. *Telematics and Informatics*, *35*(6), 1656–1664. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2018.04.011

Chatterjee, R., & Correia, A. P. (2020). Online students' attitudes toward collaborative learning and sense of community. *American Journal of Distance Education*, *34*(1), 53-68.

Chau, M. M., Burgermaster, M., & Mamykina, L. (2018). The use of social media in nutrition interventions for adolescents and young adults—A systematic review. *International Journal of Medical Informatics*, *120*, 77-91.

Cheng, J., Burke, M., & de Gant, B. (2021). Country differences in social comparison on social media. *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, *4*(CSCW3), 1-26

Cloutier, C., & Ravasi, D. (2021). Using tables to enhance trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Strategic Organization*, *19*(1), 113–133. https://doi.org/10.1177/1476127020979329

Coccia, C., & Darling, C. A. (2016). Having the time of their life: College student stress, dating and satisfaction with life. *Stress and Health*, *32*(1), 28-35.

Coker, D. C. (2022). A thematic analysis of the structure of delimitations in the dissertation. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, *17*.

Cooke, P. J., Melchert, T. P., & Connor, K. (2016). Measuring well-being: A review of instruments. *The Counseling Psychologist*, *44*(5), 730-757.

Coyne, S. M., Rogers, A. A., Zurcher, J. D., Stockdale, L., & Booth, M. (2020). Does time spent using social media influence mental health? An eight year longitudinal study. *Computers in Human Behavior, 104*, 106160.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2017). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.

Cypress, B. (2018). Qualitative research methods. *Dimensions of Critical Care Nursing*, *37*(6), 302–309. https://doi.org/10.1097/dcc.0000000000000322

D'Arienzo, M. C., Boursier, V., & Griffiths, M. D. (2019). Addiction to social media and attachment styles: A systematic literature review. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, *17*(4), 1094–1118. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-019-00082-5

Demetriou, C., Meece, J., Eaker-Rich, D., & Powell, C. (2017). The activities, roles, and relationships of successful first-generation college students. *Journal of College Student Development*, *58*(1), 19-36.

Demir, Y. (2021). Relationships among childhood experiences, happiness, and social media addictions in adolescents. *Educational Process International Journal*, *10*(1). https://doi.org/10.22521/edupij.2021.101.2

De Vries, D. A., Möller, A. M., Wieringa, M. S., Eigenraam, A. W., & Hamelink, K. (2017). Social comparison as the thief of joy: Emotional consequences of viewing strangers' instagram posts. *Media Psychology*, *21*(2), 222–245. https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2016.1267647

Dibb, B. (2019). Social media use and perceptions of physical health. *Heliyon*, *5*(1), e00989.

Diel, K., Broeker, L., Raab, M., & Hofmann, W. (2021). Motivational and emotional effects of social comparison in sports. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, *57*, 102048.

Diener, E., Oishi, S., & Tay, L. (2018). Advances in subjective well-being research. *Nature Human Behaviour*, *2*(4), 253-260.

Dontre, A. J. (2021). The influence of technology on academic distraction: A review. *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies*, *3*(3), 379-390.

Festinger, L. (1954). A theory of social comparison processes. *Human Relations*, 7, 117e140. https://doi.org/10.1177/001872675400700202.

Figueira, Á., & Oliveira, L. (2017). The current state of fake news: Challenges and Opportunities. *Procedia computer science*, *121*, 817-825.

Frechette, J., Bitzas, V., Aubry, M., Kilpatrick, K., & Lavoie-Tremblay, M. (2020). Capturing lived experience: Methodological considerations for interpretive phenomenological inquiry. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *19*, 1609406920907254.

Gadekar, R., & Ang, P. H. (2020). Is social media use socially enhancing or compensating? *Journal of Creative Communications*, *15*(3), 269-288.

Garett, R., Lord, L. R., & Young, S. D. (2016). Associations between social media and cyberbullying: A review of the literature.

Gerber, J. P., Wheeler, L., & Suls, J. (2018). A social comparison theory meta-analysis 60+ years on. *Psychological Bulletin*, *144*(2), 177.

Gill, P., & Baillie, J. (2018). Interviews and focus groups in qualitative research: An update for the digital age. *British Dental Journal, 225*(7), 668-672. http://dx.doi.org/10.1038/sj.bdj.2018.815

Grau, S., Kleiser, S., & Bright, L. (2019). Exploring social media addiction among student millennials. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, *22*(2), 200–216. https://doi.org/10.1108/qmr-02-2017-0058

Greenhow, C., Galvin, S. M., & Staudt Willet, K. B. (2019). What should be the role of social media in education? *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, *6*(2), 178-185.

Gros, A. E. (2017). Alfred Schutz on phenomenological psychology and transcendental phenomenology. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, *48*(2), 214–239. https://doi.org/10.1163/15691624-12341329

Guest, G., Namey, E., Taylor, J., Eley, N., & McKenna, K. (2017). Comparing focus groups and individual interviews: Findings from a randomized study. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, *20*(6), 693–708. https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2017.1281601

Hadi, M. A., & José Closs, S. (2016). Ensuring rigour and trustworthiness of qualitative research in clinical pharmacy. *International journal of clinical pharmacy*, *38*(3), 641-646.

Haslam, D. M., Tee, A., & Baker, S. (2017). The use of social media as a mechanism of social support in parents. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, *26*, 2026-2037.

Hawi, N. S., & Samaha, M. (2017). The relations among social media addiction, self-esteem, and life satisfaction in university students. *Social Science Computer Review*, *35*(5), 576-586.

Hou, Y., Xiong, D., Jiang, T., Song, L., & Wang, Q. (2019). Social media addiction: Its influence, mediation, and intervention. *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace*, *13*(1).

Jääskeläinen, T. (2022). Using a transcendental phenomenological approach as a model to obtain a meaningful understanding of music students' experienced workload in higher education. *International Journal of Education & the Arts*, 23(6).

Kayaduman, H., Battal, A., & Polat, H. (2022). The relationship between undergraduate students' digital literacy and self-regulation in online interaction. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 1-12.

Kim, C., & Shen, C. (2020). Connecting activities on social network sites and life satisfaction: A comparison of older and younger users. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *105*, 106222.

Kim, R. Y. (2020). What makes people happy? An empirical investigation of panel data. *Applied Economics Letters*, *28*(2), 91–94. https://doi.org/10.1080/13504851.2020.1733471

Kim, Y., Wang, Y., & Oh, J. (2016). Digital media use and social engagement: How social media and smartphone use influence social activities of college students. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, *19*(4), 264-269.

Kircaburun, K., Alhabash, S., Tosuntaş, Ş. B., & Griffiths, M. D. (2020). Uses and gratifications of problematic social media use among university students: A simultaneous examination of the Big Five of personality traits, social media platforms, and social media use motives. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, *18*, 525-547.

Kleemans, M., Daalmans, S., Carbaat, I., & Anschütz, D. (2018). Picture perfect: The direct effect of manipulated Instagram photos on body image in adolescent girls. *Media Psychology*, *21*(1), 93-110.

Kokolakis, S. (2017). Privacy attitudes and privacy behaviour: A review of current research on the privacy paradox phenomenon. *Computers & Security*, *64*, 122-134.

Korstjens, I., & Moser, A. (2017). Series: Practical guidance to qualitative research. Part 4: Trustworthiness and publishing. *European Journal of General Practice*, *24*(1), 120–124. https://doi.org/10.1080/13814788.2017.1375092

Krutka, D. G., Manca, S., Galvin, S. M., Greenhow, C., Koehler, M. J., & Askari, E. (2019). Teaching "against" social media: Confronting problems of profit in the curriculum. *Teachers College Record*, *121*(14), 1-42.

Kwok, C., Leung, P. Y., Poon, K. Y., & Fung, X. C. (2021). The effects of internet gaming and social media use on physical activity, sleep, quality of life, and academic performance among university students in Hong Kong: A preliminary study. *Asian Journal of Social Health and Behavior*, *4*(1), 36.

Latif, K., Weng, Q., Pitafi, A. H., Ali, A., Siddiqui, A. W., Malik, M. Y., & Latif, Z. (2021). Social comparison as a double-edged sword on social media: The role of envy type and online social identity. *Telematics and Informatics*, *56*, 101470. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2020.101470

Le, T. P., Hsu, T., & Raposa, E. B. (2021). Effects of natural mentoring relationships on college students' mental health: The role of emotion regulation. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *68*(1-2), 167-176.

Leung, X. Y., Sun, J., & Bai, B. (2019). Thematic framework of social media research: state of the art. *Tourism Review*.

Lewallen, J., & Behm-Morawitz, E. (2016). Pinterest or thinterest? Social comparison and body image on social media. *Social Media + Society*, *2*(1), 205630511664055. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305116640559

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). Establishing dependability and confirmability in naturalistic inquiry through an audit.

Li, Y. (2019). Upward social comparison and depression in social network settings. *Internet Research*, *29*(1), 46–59. https://doi.org/10.1108/intr-09-2017-0358

Liu, M., Kamper-DeMarco, K. E., Zhang, J., Xiao, J., Dong, D., & Xue, P. (2022). Time spent on social media and risk of depression in adolescents: A Dose–Response Meta-Analysis. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *19*(9), 5164.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry* (1st ed.). SAGE Publications.

Longstreet, P., & Brooks, S. (2017). Life satisfaction: A key to managing internet & social media addiction. *Technology in Society*, *50*, 73-77.

Lutz, B. D., & Paretti, M. C. (2019). Development and implementation of a reflective journaling method for qualitative research. In *2019 ASEE Annual Conference & Exposition*.

Manago, A. M., & Vaughn, L. (2015). Social media, friendship, and happiness in the millennial generation. *Friendship and Happiness*, 187-206.

Mandishekwa, R. (2021). Happiness: A critical literature review.

Manca, S., & Ranieri, M. (2016). Facebook and the others. Potentials and obstacles of social media for teaching in higher education. *Computers & Education*, 95, 216-230.

Marengo, D., Montag, C., Sindermann, C., Elhai, J. D., & Settanni, M. (2021). Examining the links between active Facebook use, received likes, self-esteem, and happiness: A study using objective social media data. *Telematics and Informatics*, *58*, 101523. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2020.101523

Margolis, S., Schwitzgebel, E., Ozer, D. J., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2018). A new measure of life satisfaction: The riverside life satisfaction scale. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, *101*(6), 621–630. https://doi.org/10.1080/00223891.2018.1464457

Marques, I. C. D. S., Theiss, L. M., Johnson, C. Y., McLin, E., Ruf, B. A., Vickers, S. M., ... & Chu, D. I. (2021). Implementation of virtual focus groups for qualitative data collection in a global pandemic. *The American Journal of Surgery*, *221*(5), 918-922.

McCabe, J. M. (2016). Connecting in college. *Connecting in College*. University of Chicago Press.

McCay-Peet, L., & Quan-Haase, A. (2017). What is social media and what questions can social media research help us answer. *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media Research Methods*, 13-26.

Meier, A., & Johnson, B. K. (2022). Social comparison and envy on social media: A critical review. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 101302.

Michalos, A. C., & Michalos, A. C. (2017). Education, happiness, and wellbeing. *Connecting the Quality of Life Theory to Health, Well-Being and Education: The Selected Works of Alex C. Michalos*, 277-299.

Mogilner, C., Kamvar, S. D., & Aaker, J. (2011). The shifting meaning of happiness. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, *2*(4), 395–402. https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550610393987

Mollee, J. S., & Klein, M. C. (2016, December). The effectiveness of upward and downward social comparison of physical activity in an online intervention. In *2016 15th International Conference on Ubiquitous Computing and Communications and 2016 International Symposium on Cyberspace and Security (IUCC-CSS)* (pp. 109-115). IEEE.

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Sage Publications.

Nesi, J., Telzer, E. H., & Prinstein, M. J. (2022). *Handbook of adolescent digital media use and mental health*.

Odacı, H., & Çelik, Ç. B. (2017). Internet dependence in an undergraduate population: the roles of coping with stress, self-efficacy beliefs, and sex role orientation. *Journal of Educational Computing Research*, *55*(3), 395-409.

Oishi, S., & Gilbert, E. A. (2016). Current and future directions in culture and happiness research. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, *8*, 54-58.

Osanloo, A., & Grant, C. (2016). Understanding, selecting, and integrating a theoretical framework in dissertation research: Creating the blueprint for your "house". *Administrative Issues Journal: Connecting Education, Practice, and Research*, *4*(2), 7.

Patton, M. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Paulus, T. M., & Lester, J. N. (2020). Using software to support qualitative data analysis. *Handbook of Qualitative Research in Education* (pp. 420-429). Edward Elgar Publishing.Power. (2014). What is social media? *British Journal of Midwifery.*, *22*(12), 896–897. https://doi.org/10.12968/bjom.2014.22.12.896

Phillips, J., De Freitas, J., Mott, C., Gruber, J., & Knobe, J. (2017). True happiness: The role of morality in the folk concept of happiness. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, *146*(2), 165.

Pittman, M., & Reich, B. (2016). Social media and loneliness: Why an Instagram picture may be worth more than a thousand Twitter words. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *62*, 155-167.

Power, A. (2014). What is social media?. *British Journal of Midwifery*, *22*(12), 896-897.

Putri, E. (2022). An influence of the use Instagram application towards students vocabulary. *Pustakailmu. id*, *2*(2), 1-10.

Radovic, A., Gmelin, T., Stein, B. D., & Miller, E. (2017). Depressed adolescents' positive and negative use of social media. *Journal of Adolescence*, *55*, 5-15.

Raposa, E. B., Hagler, M., Liu, D., & Rhodes, J. E. (2021). Predictors of close faculty− student relationships and mentorship in higher education: findings from the Gallup− Purdue Index. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, *1483*(1), 36-49.

Raut, V., & Patil, P. (2016). Use of social media in education: Positive and negative influence on the students. *International Journal on Recent and Innovation Trends in Computing and Communication*, *4*(1), 281-285.

Richard, B., Sivo, S. A., Orlowski, M., Ford, R. C., Murphy, J., Boote, D. N., & Witta, E. L. (2021). Qualitative research via focus groups: Will going online affect the diversity of your findings? *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*, *62*(1), 32–45. https://doi.org/10.1177/1938965520967769

Robinson, J., Cox, G., Bailey, E., Hetrick, S., Rodrigues, M., Fisher, S., & Herrman, H. (2016). Social media and suicide prevention: A systematic review. *Early Intervention in Psychiatry*, *10*(2), 103-121.

Rosen, L. D. (2017). The distracted student mind—enhancing its focus and attention. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *99*(2), 8-14.

Rozgonjuk, D., Ryan, T., Kuljus, J. K., Täht, K., & Scott, G. G. (2019). Social comparison orientation mediates the relationship between neuroticism and passive Facebook use.

Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace, *13*(1). https://doi.org/10.5817/cp2019-1-2

Rucks-Ahidiana, Z., & Bork, R. H. (2020). How relationships support and inform the transition to community college. *Research in Higher Education*, *61*(5), 588-602.

Rudrum, S., Casey, R., Frank, L., Brickner, R. K., MacKenzie, S., Carlson, J., & Rondinelli, E. (2022). Qualitative research studies online: Using prompted weekly journal entries during the COVID-19 pandemic. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *21*, 16094069221093138.

Sapacz, M., Rockman, G., & Clark, J. (2016, April). Are we addicted to our cell phones? *Computers in Human Behavior*, *57*, 153–159. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2015.12.004

Seabrook, E. M., Kern, M. L., & Rickard, N. S. (2016). Social networking sites, depression, and anxiety: A systematic review. *JMIR Mental Health*, *3*(4), e5842.

Schmuck, D., Karsay, K., Matthes, J., & Stevic, A. (2019). "Looking Up and Feeling Down". The influence of mobile social networking site use on upward social comparison, self-esteem, and well-being of adult smartphone users. *Telematics and Informatics*, *42*, 101240. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2019.101240

Sheldon, P., Herzfeldt, E., & Rauschnabel, P. A. (2020). Culture and social media: the relationship between cultural values and hashtagging styles. *Behaviour & Information Technology*, *39*(7), 758-770.

Sharma, A., Kaushal, S., Fulzele, R., & Kumari, T. (2022, March). Role of social media in engaging students: Perspectives from higher education. In *2022 8th International Conference on Advanced Computing and Communication Systems (ICACCS)* (Vol. 1, pp. 1683-1686). IEEE.

Siddiqui, S., & Singh, T. (2016). Social media has its influence with positive and negative aspects. *International Journal of Computer Applications Technology and Research*, *5*(2), 71-75.

Smith, E. E. (2016). "A real double-edged sword:" Undergraduate perceptions of social media in their learning. *Computers & Education*, *103*, 44-58.

Stadtfeld, C., Vörös, A., Elmer, T., Boda, Z., & Raabe, I. J. (2019). Integration in emerging social networks explains academic failure and success. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *116*(3), 792-797.

Tiggemann, M., & Anderberg, I. (2020). Social media is not real: The effect of 'Instagram vs reality'images on women's social comparison and body image. *New Media & Society*, *22*(12), 2183-2199.

Thomas, L., Orme, E., & Kerrigan, F. (2020). Student loneliness: The role of social media through life transitions. *Computers & Education*, *146*, 103754.

Tov, W. (2018). Well-being concepts and components.

Twenge, J. M., Spitzberg, B. H., & Campbell, W. K. (2019). Less in-person social interaction with peers among US adolescents in the 21st century and links to loneliness. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, *36*(6), 1892-1913.

Uchida, Y., & Oishi, S. (2016). The happiness of individuals and the collective. *Japanese Psychological Research*, *58*(1), 125–141. https://doi.org/10.1111/jpr.12103

Uram, P., & Skalski, S. (2022). Still logged in? The link between Facebook addiction, FoMO, self-esteem, life satisfaction and loneliness in social media users. *Psychological Reports*, *125*(1), 218-231.

Valkenburg, P. M. (2022). Social media use and well-being: What we know and what we need to know. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, *45*, 101294.

Van Den Beemt, A., Thurlings, M., & Willems, M. (2020). Towards an understanding of social media use in the classroom: a literature review. *Technology, Pedagogy and Education*, *29*(1), 35-55.

Verduyn, P., Gugushvili, N., Massar, K., Täht, K., & Kross, E. (2020). Social comparison on social networking sites. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, *36*, 32–37. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2020.04.002

Viviani, M., & Pasi, G. (2017). Credibility in social media: opinions, news, and health information—a survey. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Data Mining and Knowledge Discovery*, *7*(5), e1209.

Watts, L. K., Wagner, J., Velasquez, B., & Behrens, P. I. (2017). Cyberbullying in higher education: A literature review. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *69*, 268-274.

Wolf, M., Sims, J., & Yang, H. (2018). Social media? What social media? *UKAIS* (p. 3).

Workman, D., Kielhofner, G., & Taylor, R. (2017). Ensuring ethical research. *Taylor, R. Kielhofner's Research in Occupational Therapy: Methods of Inquiry for Enhancing Practice*, 144-161.

Yang, C., Holden, S. M., Carter, M. D., & Webb, J. J. (2018). Social media social comparison and identity distress at the college transition: A dual-path model. *Journal of Adolescence*, *69*(1), 92–102. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2018.09.007

Yang, C. C., & Robinson, A. (2018). Not necessarily detrimental: Two social comparison orientations and their associations with social media use and college social adjustment. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *84*, 49–57. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2018.02.020

Zachos, G., Paraskevopoulou-Kollia, E. A., & Anagnostopoulos, I. (2018). Social media use in
    higher education: A review. *Education Sciences*, *8*(4), 194.

Zhang, J., Marino, C., Canale, N., Charrier, L., Lazzeri, G., Nardone, P., & Vieno, A. (2022).
    The effect of problematic social media use on happiness among adolescents: The
    mediating role of lifestyle habits. *International Journal of Environmental Research and
    Public Health*, 19(5), 2576. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19052576

Zhuravskaya, E., Petrova, M., & Enikolopov, R. (2020). Political effects of the internet and
    social media. *Annual Review of Economics*, *12*, 415-438.

Appendices

Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

September 19, 2023

William Longwell
Vonda Beavers

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY23-24-302 THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND HOW IT RELATES TO THEIR PERCIEVED HAPPINESS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Dear William Longwell, Vonda Beavers,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) 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 the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(ii). 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:
Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or

For a PDF of your exemption letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study details page. Finally, click Initial under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab toward the bottom of the Submission Details page. Your information sheet and final versions of your study documents can also be found on the same page under the Attachments tab.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office

Appendix B: Recruitment Request

ATTENTION: I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Philosophy in Education degree at Liberty University. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to understand how undergraduate students describe their experiences with social media and how it may be related to their perceived happiness. To participate, you must be 18 or older, actively enrolled in an undergraduate program within the United States and have first-hand experience with social media. Participants, if willing, will be asked to complete a journal prompt describing their experience with social media, participate in an audio- and video-recorded one-on-one interview and participate in one of two audio- and video-recorded focus groups. It should take approximately 10 – 15 minutes to complete each question of the journal prompts, 45 – 60 minutes to complete the interview, and 45 – 60 minutes to complete each focus group. All interviews and focus groups will be conducted virtually by using Microsoft Teams. Participants will be allowed to review the interview transcripts for accuracy. The transcripts will be sent through secure email to the participants and returned after the review is completed. If you would like to participate and meet the study criteria, please reach out via the E-Mail listed below. An information sheet will be emailed to you before the interview. Participants will receive a digital $25 Amazon gift card upon completion of their role in the study.

Thank you!

William R. Longwell

Appendix C: Information Sheet

Title of the Project: The lived experiences of undergraduate students' use of social media and how it relates to their perceived happiness: A phenomenological study.

Principal Investigator: William R. Longwell, Doctoral Candidate, School of Education, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be between 18 and 30 years of age, actively enrolled in an undergraduate course within the United States and have first-hand experience with social media. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to better understand the phenomenon between the use of social media and the perceived happiness levels in first-year college students. This study will identify the lived experiences of participant's use of social media and how it may relate to their perceived happiness.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:
1. Take part in a journal prompt where you will answer identified questions and expand on your lived experiences with social media. It should take approximately 10 – 15 minutes to answer each question.
2. Take part in a one-on-one individual interview that will be audio- and video-recorded. It should take approximately 45 – 60 minutes to complete the interview.
3. Be placed in one of two focus groups where you will take part in a group interview, which will be audio- and video-recorded. It should take approximately 45 – 60 minutes to complete each focus group.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should expect to receive a digital $25 Amazon gift card upon completion of their role in the study to include the journal prompt, individual interviews, focus group interviews, and the validation of their transcribed information from each interview.

Benefits to society include increased public awareness of how social media use may relate to the users' perceived happiness.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

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

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports 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 access the records.

- Participant responses will be given pseudonyms for the study.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer. Any hard copy data, if applicable, will be stored in a secured cabinet. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted and all hardcopy records will be shredded.
- Interviews/focus groups 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.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other focus group members may share what was discussed with people outside of the group. If you choose to turn your video off during the focus group interview, that will be accepted

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any questions or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and not 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.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is William Longwell. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at ███████████ and/or ████████████████ You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Vonda Beavers, at ████████████████.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

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 IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations.

The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Appendix D: Journal Prompt

The purpose of the journal prompt is to allow you the chance to reflect on how social media use may have related to your perceived happiness today. Below you will find examples of journal prompts, which are only examples to help provoke thought which you can use to help conduct your daily journal entries. Each journal prompt should only take 10-15 minutes each to complete.

Journal Prompt Questions

1. What type of content do you spend the most time viewing on your social media platforms?

2. How do you feel when you do not have immediate access to your social media platforms?

3. How does the use of social media influence your relationships?

4. Describe a time you viewed social media content that made you happy.

5. Describe a time you viewed social media content that made you angry.

6. Describe the type of content most frequently on your social media feeds.

Appendix E: IRB Modification Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

October 10, 2023

William Longwell
Vonda Beavers

Re: Modification - IRB-FY23-24-302 THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND HOW IT RELATES TO THEIR PERCIEVED HAPPINESS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Dear William Longwell, Vonda Beavers,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has rendered the decision below for IRB-FY23-24-302 THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND HOW IT RELATES TO THEIR PERCIEVED HAPPINESS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY.

Decision: Exempt

Your request to no longer restrict participants to individuals under 30 years of age and to compensate participants by giving each a $25 Amazon e-gift card has been approved. Thank you for submitting your revised study documents for our review and documentation. For a PDF of your modification letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study Details page. Finally, click Modification under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab toward the bottom of the Submission Details page. If your modification required you to submit revised documents, they can be found on the same page under the Attachments tab.

Thank you for complying with the IRB's requirements for making changes to your approved study. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions.

We wish you well as you continue with your research.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office

Appendix F: Participant Information

Table 1

Participant Information

#:	Name: (Pseudonym)	Gender	Ethnicity:	Focus Group #	Home State
P1	April	Female	African American	2	California
P2	Cami	Female	Caucasian	1	New Mexico
P3	Ember	Female	Hispanic	1	Kentucky
P4	Janet	Female	African American	1	Missouri
P5	Jimmy	Male	Caucasian	2	New Mexico
P6	Karen	Female	Hispanic	2	Wisconsin
P7	Sarah	Female	Caucasian	2	Pennsylvania
P8	Sean	Male	Caucasian	2	South Dakota
P9	Wallace	Male	Caucasian	N/A	Montana
P10	Sam	Male	Caucasian	N/A	Tennessee

Appendix G: Theme and Subthemes

Table 2

Theme and Subthemes

Sub-theme	Keywords and Phrases
Theme 1: Purpose Behind Social Media Use	
Relationships	Family, space, friendship, relationships, partner, parents, conversation, professional
Connectedness	World, fitness, share, connect, communication, together, recommendations, entertainment, lifestyle, homesteading
Theme 2: Impacts of Social Media Use	
Bittersweet	Positive, negative, happy, sad, good, depressed, angry, bad, failures,
Emotional	Happy, feelings, uplifting, jealous, worth, trauma, optimistic, detrimental, anxiety, failures, depression
Theme 3: Unintentional Outcomes	
Social Comparison	Comparing, celebrities, beauty, aspire, admire, subconsciously, influences, celebrities, observation
Behavioral Influences	Conscious, perception, nervousness, anxiety, self-conscious, cranky, angry, addicted, mood, sub-conscious