

Social Media and the Construction of “Self”: How Our New Sociotechnical Environment is Changing the Construction of Identity

Lucie Caffrey

A research paper submitted to the University of Dublin,
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science Interactive Digital Media

2017

DECLARATION

I have read and understand the plagiarism provisions in the General Regulations of the University Calendar for the current year, found at: <http://www.tcd.ie/calendar>

I have also completed the Online Tutorial on avoiding plagiarism, 'Ready, Steady, Write', located at <http://tcd-ie.libguides.com/plagiarism/ready-steady-write>

I declare that the work described in this research paper is, except where otherwise stated, entirely my own work and has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this university or any other university.

Signed: _____

Lucie Caffrey

11/05/2017

PERMISSION TO LEND AND/OR COPY

I agree that Trinity College Library may lend or copy this research
Paper upon request.

Signed: _____

Lucie Caffrey

11/05/2017

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take the opportunity to thank my supervisor, Susan Gill, for her support, belief and kindness throughout this process. I would like to thank my parents for their unending support this year, I would definitely not have made it this far without them. And I would also like to thank my friends and classmates who listened and supported me without hesitation when they were needed. Thank you guys!

SUMMARY

The proliferation of technology within the past 20 years has brought about a fundamental change in the way society communicates, operates and relates to itself. As the line between humans and technology is becoming increasingly blurred, technology, through its features and connective capabilities, is expanding individual's conception and construction of 'self'.

The paper takes a qualitative approach to the current research and theoretical foundations of identity construction to distinguish the vital components of empirical identity creation that are necessary for the development of the 'self'. This framework is then used to examine the relationship between the 'self' and technology in order to determine how our new sociotechnical environment is impacting the traditional process of identity construction.

As a result of the analysis, this paper identifies two main aspects of identity creation that are impacted through our relationship with technology; the storing of memory and the process of self-reflection. Born out of new norm, are structures of interaction, communication and thinking patterns which are intrinsically changing the way we shape our sense of 'self'. Ultimately, it is found that our online environments are facilitating the enhancement of our narcissistic qualities and the cultivation of a 'self' that is intrinsically dictated by external 'others', where the traditionally internal influences on the 'self' are becoming externalized and our sense of agency is considered 'illusory'. It is theorized that through the implementation of self-reflective practices in our online environments, individuals may reclaim not only a better sense of their identity but also reclaim their agency within these new online environments.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
LITERATURE REVIEW	3
EMPIRICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR IDENTITY	3
POSTMODERN IDENTITY THEORIES	4
METHODS FOR SOCIAL IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION	6
THE DEVELOPMENT OF IDENTITY: MEMORY AND SELF-REFLECTION	8
INTEGRATING TECHNOLOGY AS PART OF THE 'SELF'	10
SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF SELF	15
FREEDOM OF CONSTRUCTION: OFFLINE VS. ONLINE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT	16
IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA	24
AGENCY WITHIN SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS	28
CONCLUSION	32
BIBLIOGRAPHY	34

INTRODUCTION

Within the past 20 years, a fundamental societal shift has occurred through the introduction of a vast array of technological devices. The last ten years has particularly brought an unprecedented transformation in the way society communicates, operates and ultimately relates to itself with the proliferation of communication platforms accessed via our smartphone devices. As global mobile phone penetration rates have increased from 4% in 1997 to 51% in 2007 and were at an all-time high of 93% in 2013 (Kornstein, 2015), these devices are now becoming an inherent part of who we are as individuals; opening the barriers of communication to the rest of the world and changing the way in which we interact with each other and, most importantly, ourselves. As the first globally connected society, we have never before seen an invention have such an impact so rapidly, with global penetration levels increasing from 1% to 93% within a 20-year time frame (Kornstein, 2015). As this immersion has occurred so quickly, society has had little time to truly adapt to this new technological environment.

Within this new 'sociotechnical' society, is the allure of constant distraction where we are relentlessly berated with new content, images and the opportunity to connect with constant access to the world via our smartphones. With the emergence of this age of networking and connection, our ultimate aim is to be connected with as many "others" as possible at every moment. Where once our ultimate archetype was the idea of the nuclear family connecting around the dinner table, we now aspire to a "Facebook Utopia", connecting with the world through an online environment (Fischetti, 2014). Born out of this new norm, are structures of interaction, communication and even, as will be explored later, thinking patterns which are intrinsically changing us as individuals. As the line between humans and technology increasingly begins to blur with the introduction of new innovations, it is important to examine the impact that the developing dependency on these tools will begin to have on the construction the of 'self'. Caught in the transitory period between the pre-technology era and total technological immersion, we are the generation that is at the foreground of this fundamental shift and as such it is important that these concepts are examined now so that

as we begin to rely on more technology, we are aware of the intrinsic nature of this close technological relationship and impact that this will have on the 'self' and society.

The paper that proceeds this will take a qualitative analysis approach to the current research and theoretical foundations regarding identity creation to compile an effective analysis of the impact of these new technologies on the construction of identity and the 'self' within this new society. The analysis firstly outlines the various traditional theories of both identity construction and self-representation in order to develop a framework under which the rest of the paper will be carried out. The proceeding section will then comprise of a short analysis of the development and impact of the relationship that exists between humans and technology, specifically investigating the ways in which our internalization of technology is impacting our sense of 'self'. As we are simultaneously constructing ourselves as both individuals and members of a society through our social media platforms, the third section will form an in-depth account of how the structure of these new communication platforms impacts the construction of the 'self'. Finally, the fourth section will comprise of an analysis of the degree of agency that exists within our relationship with these technological tools. Ultimately, the paper will propose certain elements of identity construction that are imperative to take into account if we are to retain aspects of the 'self' that are vital to identity creation as we move forward into a world of total technological immersion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

EMPIRICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR IDENTITY

Before analysing how technology is shaping the 'self' in today's technological environment, it is firstly pertinent to construct a foundation for the analysis by exploring the various theoretical frameworks that have been developed in relation to identity construction and self-representation.

Empirically, there have been two prevailing theoretical approaches under which one can examine the underlying foundations of identity; the modernist or postmodernist methodologies. Traditionally taken with the context of a modernist approach, identity was classified a static and definite element of the 'self', where individuals engaged in activities in order to 'discover' their true 'self' throughout their lifetime (Berzonsky, 2016). The more conventional of the two approaches, theorists positing this framework view identity as "specifiable, measurable, ordered and in some cases rational". Fundamentally, identity is stable and forming out of this modernist approach is the basis of more fixed identity theories (Howard, 2000). In contrast to this, Hall in 1996 hypothesized that rather than identity representing one "stable self", it is more a "strategic, positional" concept, citing that "identities are points of temporary attachments to the subject positions that discursive practices construct for us" (Howard, 2000). Born out of this hypothesis, is the postmodernist approach which supports a more fluid construction of identity. In contrast to 'discovering' their true identity, individuals 'construct' their sense of 'self' through various social and cultural contexts (Berzonsky, 2016). Howard theorizes identity as "multiple, processual, relational, unstable and possibly political" (Howard, 2000). There has been ample research since the development of the postmodern approach that supports this more fluid construction of identity. Blumer (1969) held that rather than fixed, the 'self' is created through dynamic processes that are inherently social in nature as "the self only achieves its central existence in situated activity" (Fisher et al., 2016). According to Fisher et al. (2016) there is a multitude of selves available to an individual at any moment, termed by Aral and Walker to be "a shifting array of accessible selves", which an individual will choose to portray depending on the particular context of the interaction. Consequently, while some aspects of

identity are arguably fixed, such as age and nationality, the rest of our identities are intrinsically social in nature (Tagg and Seargeant, 2014). Ultimately, Kellner (1995) suggested that the function of the postmodern identity is “leisure” and that therefore, it was “grounded in play, gamesmanship, and in producing an image” (Iqani and Schroeder, 2016); Given the fluidity that the technological environment gives individuals and the prominence of the social within our everyday lives it is most appropriate to examine the development of our identities under the construct of postmodern identity construction. In the following section, the fundamental aspects of postmodern identity construction will be examined within the frameworks of two prominent identity theories; social identity theory and symbolic interaction theory.

POSTMODERN IDENTITY THEORIES: SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND SYMBOLIC INTERACTION THEORY

Judith Howard (2000) in her paper “Social Psychology of Identities”, outlines the fundamental aspects of theorized identity which she suggests is constructed in the interplay between social cognition and symbolic interaction.

Within social cognition theories individuals are posited to have limited cognitive abilities whereby they must implement a streamlining strategy when consuming the volume of information that they encounter on a daily basis (Howard, 2000). In relation to this is *social identity theory*, which postulates that identity arises from a process of “depersonalization” (Carter and Grover, 2010) through which individuals identify themselves in terms of the social groups in which they interact. The main underlying function of this theory is that identity is constructed and managed through a framework of direct impression management. This process of ‘depersonalization’ can easily be used as the underpinning psychological theory to analyze identity creation via social media sites. Heavily mediated by impression management and the feedback from others, identities created via these online sites are heavily influenced by the other members of the social media groups in which individuals interact. Thus mimicking the actions posited within the theory – individuals will “favor group traits more than unique character traits” (Howard, 2000).

Under the *symbolic interactionist approach* to identity construction, individuals attach symbolic meanings, developed and communicated through interaction, to objects, behaviours, themselves and other people (Howard, 2000). Within this framework language is a vital component (Howard, 2000). Empirical studies relating to language, media and identity construction have shown that both verbal and non-verbal forms are equally vital in the process of identity construction (Howard, 2000). Under this approach, Turkle (2005) examines how we construct identities by recognizing similarities in the classification of an alternative object through which we can make analogies to ease our comprehension of the new object/person/behavior being identified. Breaking down this framework further, it can be examined under two prefixes. Firstly, the structuralist approach - which posits that identities are formed depending on social hierarchies and the position and role an individual holds within a social structure. The second method that can be examined “emphasizes the processes of identity construction and negotiation” and theorizes that individuals strategically construct their identities on the basis of social interactions. Whether taken from a structuralist or strategic view, the fundamental proposition to both is the premise that identity is intrinsically linked to and formed through our social interactions.

Fisher et al. (2016) outline Mead’s 1934 theory of the ‘self’ in their analysis of the online construction of the identity. Combining aspects of both social identity theory and symbolic interaction theory, Mead coherently split the identity into two parts; ‘I’ and ‘Me’. Firstly, ‘I’ was referring to an individual’s desire to ‘discover’ their identity through observation of their own behavior and subsequently altering this after a process of self-observation and feedback. Secondly, ‘Me’ was an aspect of identity formulated from the social and cultural interactions of the individual. As this theory takes into account both an inherent individual identity that is unique to oneself and also the impact of the social contexts wherein the individual operates, it is most appropriate to utilize an approach such as this when conducting the following analysis.

With the proliferation of technology and the fundamental changes that have now occurred within the ‘self’, social conditions and interactions now play an even bigger role in the shaping of our identity. Taylor (2011) posits that traditionally our main social influencers

were restricted to family, friends, school, our community, extracurricular activities and to a lesser extent media, which all promoted a “healthier, positive message about who we were and how we should perceive ourselves”. Now our environment has changed substantially and with that the balance between internal and external influencers has shifted. Now we are being driven by influencers that are no longer as innocent and self-promoting as they once were. Instead of reinforcing our self-identity, our technology influencers show us a ‘portrait’ of who it wants us to be, “tapping into our most basic needs to feel good about [ourselves], accepted, and attractive” (Taylor, 2011). Individuals now have the freedom and opportunity to create their identities online in a variety of different ways, as Goffman posits, “identities are like masks that can be worn and taken off in different contexts of social interaction” (Tagg and Seargeant, 2014). Crandall (2007) theorizes that “presentational culture” present throughout history has now emerged with greater intensity as individuals have the opportunity to pay much more attention to the ‘self’ than ever before through online profiles (Tagg and Seargeant, 2014). Here the ‘self’ refers to the particular aspects of identity that individuals choose to portray to the public. Given this presentational culture, the following section will comprise of an analysis of the various theories surrounding the ways in which individuals can choose to represent the ‘self’.

METHODS FOR SOCIAL IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

According to “the Father of American Psychology”, William James (1890), the ‘self’ is constructed of four subclasses of ‘self’ which work together to formulate an individual’s self-concept; the material Self, the spiritual Self, the pure Ego and the social Self. In terms of this analysis the most pertinent of these to examine is the social Self. James (1890) holds that as humans we have an innate desire to be noticed and get recognition from those around us and as such he theorizes that “a man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him” (James, 1890). Prus (1997) would term this part of the self as the “relational self” (Fisher et al., 2016). What motivates the construction of this ‘rational self’? An exploration of three prominent methods to self-representation will now be examined. Empirically, in psychological research it is found that individuals portray themselves in

accordance with three main theories; the self-enhancement theory, the self-verification theory and self-discrepancy theory.

Building on the above social construction of identity, Bareket-Bojmel et al. (2016) highlight that *self-enhancement theory* posits that individuals are driven to represent themselves by a desire to maximize positive and minimize negative impressions on others. McDougall (1933) and Koffka (1935) highlight how “self-enhancement is a central goal of human existence” (Swann et al., 1989) and self-enhancement theory as a method of self-presentation has received support by many empirical studies. Langman (1998) identified the vital components that shape identity to be: “seeking attachments to others, pursuit of recognition and dignity; feelings of empowerment; avoiding fear and anxiety” (Howard, 2000).

On the other hand, *self-verification theory* holds that individuals are more internally driven to represent themselves according to their own “firmly held self-views” (Bareket-Bojmel et al., 2016). Swann, Pelham and Krull (1989) theorize that individuals do so by “soliciting feedback” from their social interactions. Within this theory it is posited that individuals will seek to portray themselves in such a way so that others will view them in congruence with how they internally identify themselves, even if this requires them to highlight their “flaws and limitations” (Swann et al., 1989). Brown et al. (1988) suggest that this allows the individual to exert a sense of control over their environment (Swann et al., 1989). Within this framework, Taylor (2011) emphasizes that we are inherently social creatures who use the feedback from others as a vital component in the evolution our self-identities.

The third and final theory which can be examined is *self-discrepancy theory*. According to Hu, Zhao and Huang (2015) self-discrepancy theory posits that the ‘self’ is comprised of three different elements; the actual self, ideal self and the ought self. The ‘actual self’, comprising of the attributes that the individual believes they actually possess, the ‘ideal’ comprising of those they aspire to possess and the ‘ought’ comprising of those they feel the need or obligation to possess (Hu et al, 2015). With the overall theory positing that individuals construct their identity to ensure the discrepancy between their actual self and their ideal or ought selves is minimized. Taylor (2011) proposes that we create our identity using a combination of our self-awareness - as we “evaluate our thoughts, feelings, and behavior based on past experience, current needs and future goals” - and also from external

conditions and feedback which we internalize to shape our identity. He also posits the fundamental importance of our social interactions in the development of the self.

In terms of which theory individuals deploy, Swann et al. (1989) conducted an analysis to infer in which context each framework is more likely to be utilized. Theorists such as Taylor and Brown (1988) and Ahadzadeh et al. (2017) held that individuals with lower self-esteem were more likely to engage in self-verification and self-discrepancy processes, whereas Freud postulated that those individuals and narcissistic tendencies are more likely to employ self-enhancement methodologies in order to represent the 'self' (Swann et al., 1989).

Given that the basis of identity construction has been identified, it is now appropriate to examine two aspects of identity that are vital to the construction and development processes that are inherent within the construction of the 'self'.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF IDENTITY: MEMORY AND SELF-REFLECTION

As examined above, identity construction is influenced heavily by the social interactions and social environments within which the individual operates. It is now pertinent to examine the aspects present within the 'self' that are fundamental in the development and evolution of identity. Within all forms of identity construction, there are two fundamental aspects that are irrefutable in the development and construction of the 'self'; the storing of memory and the ability to self-reflect.

Throughout history, many sociologists and philosophers including Plato, Carr and Turkle have cited the importance of memory in the shaping of the 'self'. Traditionally, identities within society were founded through a collective memory discourse, with members of the community relying on each individual's specific memories to make up a particular part of the collective memory. As Wegner and Ward (2013) posited "any one individual is incomplete without being able to draw on the rest of the group". Individual identities were based on a reliance of the group and in order to function effectively, social connections were of paramount importance. We can see this importance reflected in the theories above, which postulate the significance of our social interactions and environments throughout the

process of identity construction. Foucault (1999), identified the importance of the collection and recollection of the information that one hears, reads or thinks as central to the shaping of 'self' (Weisgerber & Butler, 2016). Not just for the good of the individual but, in Foucault's mind, this process of storing information was an act of "self-care" that is indicative of "an attitude towards the self, others and the world" (Weisgerber & Butler, 2016) through which individuals can transform themselves and in turn aid in the shaping of the community.

Inherently linked to memory, the development of identity is also born out of the feedback process intrinsic in social interactions. As can be seen from the above, identity is constructed as a result of the social contexts and interactions of the individual, where a presentational strategy is selected and individuals are employing "various identities within different contexts" (Carter & Grover, 2010). This concept is determined over time resulting from observation and comparison relative to others, their personal goals, the perception and response of others and, importantly, their self-evaluations (Carter & Grover, 2010). In any given situation, through a process of self-reflection, individuals can alter or change their identity in accordance with, and as a result of the perception of others with the overall outcome being that "the identity becomes verified and self-esteem protected or enhanced" (Carter & Grover, 2010). Ultimately, what James (1890) termed 'club-opinion', is one of the 'strongest forces in life' and has the ability to alter and change an individual's identity once this self-reflective process is enacted. Research conducted by Burke (2006) also supported this theory, highlighting that once an individual entered into a pattern of repeatedly altering their behavior in response to feedback from the environment their identity would ultimately change (Carter & Grover, 2010). Furthermore, Charng et al. (1988) conducted research which concluded that "repeated behaviours can become ingrained into a person's sense of self" (Carter & Grover, 2010).

As can be seen from the above, the role that memory and self-reflection play in the construction and subsequent development of identity is crucial. Identity, intrinsically linked to shifts in historical cultural configurations (Howard, 2000), is currently undergoing a radical transformation process with our offline and online lives becoming increasingly merged into a "sociotechnical" version of society that is increasingly impacting these traditional processes. As we develop our identities in this new emerging society it is now pertinent to examine the changing identity that the 'self' is experiencing in the wake of these developments.

INTEGRATING TECHNOLOGY AS PART OF THE 'SELF'

This section comprises of an analysis of the changing identity of the 'self' that has accompanied the development and proliferation of smartphone devices. With global mobile devices and connections growing from 7.6 billion in 2015 to 8.0 billion in 2016 and the Cisco Visual Networking Index Forecast predicting that the number of mobile devices will increase to 11.6 billion (i.e. 1.5 mobile devices per capita) by 2021, our relationship with our mobile devices is of increasing importance. With adoption rates of these devices rising on a daily basis, Katz & Aakhus (2002) attributes the drive for "perpetual contact" as the reason for the growth in devices that allow us constant contact to the world at all times (Vishwanath & Chen, 2008). With predicted growth levels of these devices set as of the above, it is worthwhile examining how the intimate relationship with these devices began and the ways in which this relationship is beginning to alter how individuals identify the 'self'.

Firstly, our relationship with technology began to change as human's imbued computers with social and human characteristics, resulting in an interaction style reflecting more of a human-human communication form rather than a human-computer or human-tool form. Ample research has been carried out as to the reasons behind our specific intoxication with technology. Turkle (2005) suggests that this relationship with technology may come from the fact that humans struggle to identify what these devices actually signify. Naturally, within the process of attributing an identity to an object, humans will attempt to find a suitable analogy that will be used in order to create a connection between the identity of the new object and the identity of the comparable object. For example, in the identification of an airplane the analogy of a bird can be used (Turkle, 2005). The closest analogy that humans can make for the complex and logical function of technological devices is that of the human brain, and as a result, attributing human characteristics and traits to the computer becomes more natural (Turkle, 2005). Although it is posited by Turkle to be actively enacted by individuals, within psychology this process is termed "Anthropomorphism" and deemed to be an innate element of human nature. Whether active or innate, the process of anthropomorphism is evidenced as individuals seek to personalize our devices, altering and individualizing ring tones, phone covers, wallpapers etc. (Wang, 2017). This personalization is physical

representation of the relationship we have with our devices, actively highlighting our inference of characteristics and personality on to them, becoming not just our personal tool but an actual being in and of itself (Turkle, 2003). The above theory regarding the human-technological relationship is the fundamental concept of the Computers as Social Actors paradigm, which states the relationship between individuals and computers is “inherently a social one” (Wang, 2017).

Empirical research highlights how designers of our devices are playing upon our anthropomorphic tendencies in order to create closer, human-like relationships between the individual and technology, with the exchange interfaces that we engage with computers through essentially designed to mimic the “communication cycle of human-human interactions” (Kim & Sundar, 2012); take for example the use of the Apple assistant Siri. When interfaces are designed like those in chatrooms or social media platforms “users are more likely to feel a stronger sense of social presence during their interactions than if the interface was simply user-system interactions” (Kim & Sundar, 2012). Designed to elicit a ‘realism heuristic’ from the user, this reminds the user of human to human communication “positively influencing” information credibility and “providing the illusion of a realistic natural interaction” (Kim & Sundar, 2012). Sundar (2004) shows that the longer the relationship one has with these devices the more likely for this social association with computers to be both “automatic and mindless”. Consequently, as we can see from the above analysis, the inherent human attribution of social characteristics to objects is unsurprising especially when coupled with the fact that these instincts are utilized by designers to create strong bonds between human and technology.

Not only do we interact with these tools as social beings but our relationship with technology has gone beyond just interacting with these devices on a purely social level. When first introduced as a device, the computer was viewed as a tool for productivity and efficiency, allowing individuals more free time to focus on more important tasks. As these tools have developed however, the relationship between individual and tool is becoming blurred. First posited by Belk (2016) in his research, it is theorized that individuals have in fact begun to change the way in which we are identifying the ‘self’, internalizing these devices as an extension of the ‘self’. This concept of internalization is not one that is new to society. Tools have consistently been created and then incorporated as part of the ‘self’ throughout the

course of history; the knife became an extension of the hand, increasing our physical strength; clothes became an extension of our skin, increasing our protection; (Case, 2010) and now technology is becoming an extension of our cognition. The fundamental difference with this internalization, inherently lies within the fact that rather than an extension of our physical selves, technology is expanding our mental and cognitive 'self', an extension that is unprecedented and with that the effect of which is, as of yet, illusive. Belk was the most recent of many researchers to conduct an analysis into this fundamental change in the state of 'self', ultimately inferring that this internalization and extension of self may be a result of many different factors including; the perceptive control that individuals have over the object, cultural influences that infer meaning on possessions, technological factors such as social presence, mobility, information richness, task characteristics, urgency of task, information needs, the need for individuation, technological innovativeness, uncertainty avoidance, power distance and collectivism (Vishwanath & Chen, 2008).

A representation of the internalization of these tools is also highlighted by Belk (2016). With the constant distraction of what is happening in our online world incessantly calling us, we are rarely present in our offline surroundings. This has now become so ingrained in society that a new fear, identified as "nomophobia", is beginning to take hold (Belk, 2016). More and more we hear the term "FOMO" - a "fear of missing out" on what is happening on our social networks - which rather than a trivial popularized term, is becoming an actualized fear in society. Research by Belk (2016) has shown technology to have become such an extension of self that when people are removed from the ability to connect online they "feel phantom vibrations from mobile phones, even when they are not carrying one", likening it to the effect of "phantom limb syndrome". This description is clearly a very dramatic and important one and evident from it is how dependent on this constant connection to technology we are.

Further research studies also have been conducted which confirm how this internalization is affecting our sense of 'self'. As highlighted above, the importance of memory within identity construction is cited by many theorists (Plato, Turkle, Carr) and as this internalization occurs we are experiencing a fundamental change in the function of our memory. Wegner & Ward (2013) conducted an analysis of the effect that, not only the utilization of Google has but even simply the opportunity to access Google has on our assessment of cognitive ability. Their research suggests that we are moving away from traditional structures and perceptions

of society in relation to our cognitive patterns and memories. As explored earlier, where we once relied on a “distributed memory” system whereby individuals benefit from the collective memory of the community, we are now removing the external dependency on each other and replacing it with a “transactive memory system” with our devices, which Wegner & Ward (2013) term the “Google effect”. When we have access to these information systems we rely less on our own cognitive abilities, allowing for the outsourcing of memory to these devices. Our constant access to this outsourced memory only enhancing our dependency on these tools as “people are often unable to fix details in their own thoughts when in the presence of their cyberbuddy” (Wegner & Ward, 2103). Results from their research further highlight how even when using Google to answer questions, subjects had an increased sense of their own cognitive ability. Using Google had given subjects “the illusion that their own mental capabilities had provided the right answer” and gave them a sense that Google had become an expanded part of their own “cognitive tool set” (Wegner & Ward, 2103). This research can be viewed under the context of structural symbolic interactionism, which posits that individuals may “incorporate capabilities of the material object to which they have become emotionally attached into their individual self-concepts” (Carter and Grover, 2015).

In his book “The Shallows”, Carr (2010) identifies the ways in which our interaction with technology is profoundly altering our neurological patterns ultimately changing the way we think, process and store information. Within the disjointed and distracting world of technology, our thought patterns are becoming increasingly ‘fragmented’, not allowing time for individuals to focus on one topic for more than a few seconds and meaning that “our working memory is constantly filled with new information at a pace faster than information can be processed” (Carr, 2010). In adopting such a close relationship with these tools, Carr (2011) indicates neurologists haven proven that as we learn and utilize new interactive features, we are constantly modifying the functions of the brain with “old functions becoming overwritten” by new functions required in order to successfully operate these tools. Ultimately, this process leads to the “short term memory [being] regularly flushed to make room for new input” and leaving little information being processed into our long term memory (Carr, 2011).

As can be seen from the above analysis, not only is our need for 'perpetual contact' driving us to interact with our devices as if they were social actors but we are inherently changing fundamental aspects of the 'self' through our interaction and utilization of these devices. In the chapter that follows, these modifications will be examined in more detail in terms of the effect that our time spent on social media has on our sense of 'self'.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF SELF

The technological foundation on which our society is now built has unsurprisingly led to a shift in the way we are interacting online, allowing new ways in which we express ourselves and maintain social relationships. In the online sphere, self-representation is mainly carried out through social media platforms, which have broken down both physical constraints and normal social cues that exist in face to face interaction, giving users the ability to interact across time and space through a curated version of the 'self'. According to Statista, global social networking audiences exceeded 2 billion users in 2016, with the most popular sites, Facebook and Instagram attracting 1.86 billion and 700 million monthly active users respectively (Statista.com, 2017). Research from the Pew Research Centre found that in 2015 approximately 74% of adult internet users have at least one social media account and 52% maintain multiple profiles (Keating et al, 2015). A study into the lifestyle habits of individuals within this technological era approximated that users spent approximately 118 minutes per day on social media sites (Statista.com) and it is predicted by Mediakik that within our lifetime individuals will spend an average of 5.25 years on social media (Cohen, 2017). When compared to their findings of more fundamental tasks, where on average we spend 3.41 years eating and drinking and 1.83 years grooming, we see the proportion of time spent on these social media sites is significant and therefore the importance of the effects of these sites on the user is increasing (Cohen, 2017). As investigated in the previous sections, our relationship and constant interaction with technology is fundamentally altering who we are as individuals as we begin to construct new ideas of who and what we are through interaction with new devices. What follows in this section will be an analysis of how our use of social media is developing new ways of identity construction; firstly, through an analysis of the structure of the environment which is created through these platforms and then by conducting an investigation into the impact of these environments on the vital components of identity construction highlighted earlier – the storing of memory and the self-reflective process.

Through our social media platforms, we have a freedom in identity construction which is unprecedented. This freedom comes in the form of the ability to construct an identity online that does not necessarily constitute what is termed under self-discrepancy theory as our 'actual self' (Hu et al, 2015). Via our online profiles, individuals can construct a version of the 'self' that can be as authentic or as deceptive as they wish. Requiring no authentication of identity, we have never before had access to a platform which has given us such freedom to express a different version of our 'self'. Whether it be the "actual", "ought" or "ideal" (Zhao et al, 2015) that is portrayed, online we are unconstrained by reality where we are inhibited by physical conditions. Representing the self in congruence with what our social peers deem acceptable is not a new phenomenon as multiple theories have cited. In 1959, long before the proliferation of these sites, Goffman was proposing that presentation of the self was a "performance" and van Dijck (2013) proposes that since these sites have gained such prominence in society "the need for a multiple, composite self has only increased". We are free to be and act as we essentially wish, exploring multiple elements of the self that make up the structure of our identities So what does this sense of freedom mean for the construction of self?

It is firstly pertinent to examine the social context in which we are spending a large proportion of our daily lives. Considering the above literature which posits the importance of the influence of social context in which we operate, the differences in the social contexts between offline and online social environments warrants examining. There are a number of separate factors of these online environments that facilitate differences in the way in which we interact with each other in comparison to face to face interactions. Meshi, Tamir and Heekeren (2015) conducted an in-depth analysis that highlighted four fundamental differences in how the social norms prevalent on these sites are inherently different from offline social interactions.

Firstly, they highlight the intrinsically different structure within the nature of interaction via these platforms. We have moved from somewhat restricted communication opportunities to having access to billions of 'others', fundamentally altering our form of communication from

reciprocal interaction to “unidirectional”, with Meshi et al. highlighting that this fosters unlimited opportunities for “one-sided conversation, taking turn after turn for themselves” (Meshi et al., 2015). Rather than connecting with those already within the social circle, individuals have access to billions of other users located all over the world at any time, highlighting how the restrictive spatial and temporal conditions of offline environments have been exponentially expanded. Another feature of these environments is the public nature of the content posted as most interactions that take place can be accessed at any time and if carried out in the more public features of the apps can be accessed by anyone. We are now inherently public beings, open to feedback from those around us. According to self-verification, self-representation and self-discrepancy theory, this opportunity for feedback is a critical element to identity construction and these feedback and self-reflective processes should allow us to better develop and construct our identities.

With lack of authentication of identity online, ensuring that you are interacting with an authentic identity can prove to be very difficult. Hu, Zhao and Huang (2015) suggest that virtual identities offer an escape from “real-world restraints such as social norms, legislation and responsibilities”. Under the framework of the self-discrepancy theory, they argue for the benefits of the freedom that come from the construction of virtual identities citing the following; “the reconstruction virtual identity reflects more of the ideal self and thus makes the individual more satisfied; the individual therefore does not need to fulfill too much ought-self; the reconstructed virtual identity can protect the individual’s privacy and thus avoid potential risks”. An inherent issue in their research is their over reliance on the proposition that Facebook is a nonymous online environment where users are unlikely to “treat it as a venue for expressing their ‘hidden selves’” as users are required to reveal their names in a fixed institutional context (Hu et al., 2015). This is clearly a problematic viewpoint as it is widely known of the abundant amount of false profiles present on these sites as they, in truth, require little verification in order to set up a profile. However, research conducted by Baraket-Bojmel et al. (2016) found that regardless of whether individuals are interacting as an authentic or deceptive form of ‘self’, as a result of the lack of physical conditions and consequences they still feel unidentifiable. Consequently, although these sites enable freedom of expression, the element of anonymity that comes along with this can also prove harmful to social interactions as it is hypothesized that this anonymity can lead to more

aggressive and narcissistic behaviours. This is an important concept which warrants further discussion in the following section related to the ways in which the curation of the 'self' online allows for the development of these behaviours.

As explored earlier within the context of the interactionist approach to identity construction, language, both verbal and non-verbal, plays a vital role in the development of identity. Through our social media profiles language can be utilized in multiple different formats that allow for a wider range of expression for individuals. No longer constrained by their physical face-to-face reality, users can portray their identity both linguistically or visually through text, images, videos and content. The freedom experienced within these contexts allows for the various iterations of van Dijcks (2013) "multiple, composite self" to be portrayed without having to be evidenced through normal physical constraints. The loss of physical indications, particularly those of the communication cues inherent in both body language and verbal tone, is a major difference in interactions online versus offline. Prominent Psychologist Albert Mehrabian suggests that individuals deduce 55% of communication from body language and 38% from verbal tone, the loss of the vital cues means that we are now mostly communicating through the remaining 7% of offline communication cues (Mehrabian, 1972). With this fundamental difference, there is no question that our interactions online are founded on a completely different basis than offline communication.

Lovink (2017) describes the current social media environment as one that is obsessed with itself, in a state of "auto-information and auto-intoxication". Weisgerber & Buttler (2016) suggest that this environment of over-stimulation and bombardment of information has led to what they term an "attention economy", where content is designed to be disruptive, interrupting and distracting the user as each interest group attempts to garner attention. Berardi was also a major contributor to this notion as he suggests that the cyber environment is creating a scenario where "our full engagement as both consumers and producers of information" is "impossible" (Weisgerber & Buttler, 2016). Carr (2010), "while the net demands our complete attention, it scatters it at the same time". In order for deep thinking to occur, Carr (2010) postulates the importance of a calm and attentive mind, highlighting various psychological studies that state empathy and compassion also arise from this "settled mind". This hypothesis is crucial to the argument developed later in this paper

pertaining to question of whether individuals within this environment have essential ability of self-reflection, and as such will be revisited within that analysis.

Intrinsic in our relationship with and via these platforms is the assumption by most individuals that social media is a direct reflection of the offline world. Lovink (2017) highlights how sociologist Albert Benschop posits that the idea of a second world online does not exist and as such does not necessitate different treatment. However, as outlined in this section, there are numerous factors which account for a need for distinction between the online and offline social contexts through which identity is developed. What Benschop and many others fail to recognize is that the social media platforms are not a direct reflection of our offline lives but in truth, are compiled of curated versions of 'self', 'other' and the world.

Internalizing a constructed world

Although there are elements of freedom that the above highlights, constraints imposed on the representation of 'self' also exist within these environments that are impacting and shaping the construction of identity; the constraints are evident in many features including a limit on characters allowed per post (Twitter) and photos allowed to be posted at one time (Instagram). Ultimately, these constraints are cultivating a culture of editing and curation, and if we are examining this under the guise of self-representation theories, one must heavily edit what is posted to ensure that the most appealing form of 'self' is portrayed to our ever present audience.

The Impact of a Curated Self

As the above suggests, there is a freedom in identity construction online which allows for individuals to construct the 'self' in any way they choose. In accordance with social identity theory, Meshi, Tamir and Heekeren (2015) have found in their research that a major motivation for social media use was the ability for individuals to manage "the impression they make on others", and through social media sites users have the opportunity "to create, modify, or maintain an impression of ourselves in the minds of others" (Ahadzadeh et al.,

2017). Bareket-Bojmel et al. (2016) highlight that self-presentation methods used to curate our online 'self' are highly linked to the feedback process that is amplified within these social platforms. Particularly when individuals engage in self-derogating or self-enhancing practices (depending on their internal view of the 'self') there can be a self-perpetuating cycle of behavior and subsequent identity change stimulated by the response which they receive from their online social network; evidenced through 'likes' or 'comments' on Facebook in response to a post, for example. Bareket-Bojmel et al. (2016) highlight that engaging in such activities can "encourage the person who posted it to post more [related] statements" and as shown earlier, repeatedly engaging in these type of interactions can result in the internalization of these enhancing or derogating ideals into the individual's identity (Charng et al. (1988), Burke (2006)). By consistently changing identity based on this feedback loop Charles Cooley suggests that we will 'come to know ourselves through the mirror of other's reaction to us" (Belk, 2016).

As individuals are emboldened by distance and a lack of social norms, the communication form that develops out of these curated selves is profoundly different than that found in offline contexts. Research conducted by Aboujaoude postulates an E-personality that evolves through these online conditions, portrayed through an "exaggerated sense of our abilities, a superior attitude towards other, a new moral code online, a proneness to impulsive behavior, and a tendency to regress to childlike states when faced with an open browser" (Lopatin, 2012). The ability to curate the 'self' is postulated to allow identity to "run rampant" ultimately creating "an ordinary everyday viciousness" that "characterizes many peoples' online lives" (Lopatin, 2012). Aboujaoude suggests that the physical realities within which we operate in our offline world enforce constraints on individual's expressions of "anger, aggression and concupiscence" and the lack of these in our online worlds allows for the expression of a "more assertive and less restrained" version of the 'self' (Lopatin, 2012). Multiple researchers have supported this hypothesis. Turkle (2012) found that for some, online platforms provided a place to "act out unresolved conflicts and a place to play and replay personal difficulties on a new and exotic stage". Due to a new norm of unilateral interaction, individuals are free to succumb to an unlimited amount of self-disclosure. In comparison to offline interactions where people spend approximately 30% of their interactions speaking about themselves, online this number jumps to comprise of 80% of

social interactions, indicating the heavily narcissistic culture that exists on these social media platforms (Meshi et al., 2015). Andreassen, Pallesen and Griffiths (2017) support the above findings postulating that these social media platforms are “ideal social arenas for individuals who appreciate and are attracted to engaging in ego-enhancing activities”. Arguing that it is individuals with “elevated narcissistic traits” use these platforms to engage in interactions that “fulfill a need for affiliation and confirms the sense of an idealized self (Andreassen, Pallesen, Griffiths, 2017).

As a result of the above, Goffman (1959) may have likened these versions of the ‘self’ to ‘actors’ taking part in a theatrical performance. Individuals are on stage in front of others where, in congruence with the self-representation theories posited earlier, the positive aspects of self and the desired impressions are highlighted and reinforced through the inherent feedback loop (Bareket-Bojmel et al., 2016). More images of perfect lives that are presented within our news feed endangers rational self-reflection, a vital component of our identity construction methods. As these curated selves cannot compare to offline realities, it diminishes the ability for individuals to evaluate themselves in accordance with traditional standards of ‘self’. Jackson (2002) identifies that the more a person feels a “radical diminution” of their ‘self’ they will try to “compensate” for this by engaging activities where they ultimately “feel recognized, complemented or affirmed”. These needs can be analyzed within William James’ classic social identity construction theory, which posits three fundamental instinctive impulses within the construction of the ‘self’; bodily self-seeking, spiritual self-seeking and, the most relevant for this discussion, that of social self-seeking (James, 1890). James outlines how this instinctual need is the desire to be “recognized”, not just by those within our offline social circles whom we know and like, but by anyone who has the capacity to notice (James, 1890). Our inherent need for recognition can drive us to reach for attention warranted by “gossip or scandal” which James outlines “suits them if nothing else is to be had” (James, 1890). This can undoubtedly be witnessed in the social media environment in which we operate today. How many of us are acting out of this need for recognition rather than expressing our true opinions? If negative attention is what we crave when we are feeling unnoticed then the obvious choice is the immediate gratification that is garnered through our online feedback loop. Whether the feedback is negative or positive,

there is always an 'other' ready and waiting in the online sphere who will respond and suddenly our need for connection is satisfied and we feel less alone.

Christopher Lasch would attribute the internalization that is central in our relationship with technology, to this "culture of narcissism" found online. As Turkle (2003) highlights, society has the classic problem of "loneliness and a fear of intimacy", our new technological world provides the perfect solution, giving us the "illusion of companionship without the demands of intimacy" (Turkle, 2003). This incessant need for disconnected intimacy is what is driving our society to rely more on technology than we do on each other. The dangers of this constant editing of the 'self' are further hypothesized by Turkle (2003) as she highlights that as we become accustomed to the constant editing of 'self' online, this will lead to a degradation of our offline communication skills. The comfort of being able to heavily construct and edit the 'self' will drive us away from real face-to-face communication and further into the safety of our online worlds. It could be argued that these sites allow for the freedom of expression and provide an outlet for our frustration that we do not have within our offline contexts. However, as we are driven to these sites in our need for recognition and connection, we are spending more time constructing the 'self' through the feedback driven by our narcissism and ego. In this world of "I share, therefore I am" (Turkle, 2012), it is not just online where this construction of such a 'self' will have an impact, the transformation of the offline 'self' and the ways in which we relate and interact with each other offline will undeniably become an expression of these online versions of the self.

Within this ego driven, narcissistic construction of the world, we are in danger of being removed from the rationalities and realities of the offline world. The issue inherently lies within the fact that there is an expectation for these environments to be reflective of the real world, when in fact, the two are mutually exclusive. It is our wrongful expectation that these online worlds are reflective of our offline worlds that leads to the ultimate issue within these environments. Considering the effects of these online interactions are very much becoming ingrained, and in some cases, damaging individual's mental health, this heightened world of impression management, opinion and narcissism needs to be reconsidered as such.

The Impact of a Curated World

Intriguingly, it is not just how we are choosing to identify ourselves online that is impacting our sense of 'self'. Along with the heavy impression management strategies that make up the 'self' online, the information and the world in which we interact is heavily curated for us based on algorithms embedded into the very structure of these platforms. Eli Pariser (2011) in his TedTalk "Beware online "filter bubbles"", outlines the ways in which two people with separate ethnicities and professions get two completely different Google search results, highlighting how these platforms are constructing an identity for us to consume. So along with the identity that we curate for ourselves which we subsequently internalize, we are also given an identity by our social media worlds which, through our immersion and consumption of it, becomes inherently a part of the 'self'.

The power of social media is its ability to connect millions of people around the world with new ideas and facilitate wide ranging discussions, however, with companies like Facebook constantly giving an "algorithmic editing" of the world (Pariser, 2011) individuals are in actuality consuming a world full of invisible boundaries that most are not even conscious of. Based on demographics, content sharing and online consumption patterns Facebook will compile an identity for each user around which a world will be constructed. This construction will lead to an online environment that gives users completely tailored, somewhat biased, information - reflecting back the world according to how they think the user wants to see it but not necessarily how they need to see it. As Pariser (2011) highlights, more and more sites online are "flirting with personalization" and soon "it will be very hard for people to watch or consume something that has not been in some sense tailored for them". Kadushin (2012) found that those individuals within social networks "share the same characteristics, values and social statuses" (White, 2014) further reinforcing the bubble within which we are consuming information and content. So what are the dangers of this construction? When reality becomes based on a world that is an edited version of life it can have huge effects on society's identification with itself as our social and cultural constructs influence our identity construction significantly (Taylor (2011), Langman, (1988)).

Ultimately, as we continue to internalize these social environments and the extremes of social interaction, such as those explored in the previous section, identity becomes reinforced rather than developed through interaction with authentically new and balanced content. Although the thought of boundless information at our fingertips is satisfying, the actuality of these platforms is a world of invisible boundaries that most are not even aware of. These hidden walls that people operate in on a daily basis are especially dangerous as people do not question the content they are viewing. If these worlds are then internalized and impacting the way in which we are forming our identities, then will we become versions of 'self' dictated by these social media companies? While this is an interesting and significant topic that requires further investigation, the extensions of it are too far reaching for this paper and warrant investigation at a later date.

As can be seen from the above, the inherent structure of our online interactions are fundamentally different from those found offline and as such future identity construction will mean that individuals are basing their identities on, and internalizing a different world than ever before. In the following section, an examination of the impact of the social media environment outlined above has on two fundamental aspects of identity construction explored earlier - memory and the process of self-reflection – will be carried out.

IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA: THE IMPACT ON MEMORY AND THE SELF-REFLECTIVE PROCESS

As highlighted in various sections throughout this paper, one vital element within the construction of the 'self' that has been impacted by our internalization of technology is the memory. Via social media platforms we are collecting and storing the 'self' outside of the physical body, altering the way in which we are relating to and identifying the 'self'. When we investigate social media in terms of the curation of the 'self' then we can examine it under the framework of French philosopher and social theorist, Michael Foucault's theory of *hupomnemata*, where the "practice of collecting, annotating and selecting the information

that one hears, reads or thinks is central to the shaping of self” (Weisgerber & Butler, 2016). Taken within this context, social media provides the perfect outlet for the creation of ‘self’. Individuals have the opportunity to cultivate a virtual version of the ‘self’ through the collection of videos, photos, articles and friendships online coupled with opportunity to access this information at any time. Psychologist Erik Erikson labels, not only social media but, cyberspace as a “psychosocial moratorium” giving us the opportunity to document each of our life stages and build our history into these platforms which, as cited earlier, is enabling a reliance on these sites as a form of outsourced memory (Turkle, 2003). Conducive to this is the research conducted by Wegner and Ward examined earlier, which suggests that this outsourcing of part of our mental resources will allow us to have more time to tackle more productive tasks rather than wasting time memorizing more mundane things. They argue that this will not negatively impact our sense of identity but allow individuals to become a hybrid being with an ‘Inter-mind’, creating a ‘trans-active partnership’ with a tool that is more ‘powerful than the world has ever seen before’ (Wegner & Ward, 2013). What they fail to consider however, is the disruptive “attention economy” which exists on social media platforms that is described in the previous section. Within these environment, instead of spending more time on productive tasks, we are in fact just distracted by more content, conversations and tailoring of the ‘self’. Their research has also been refuted by multiple researchers that have postulated the implications and dangers of an outsourcing of our memories to these tools. Plato declared this externalization of memory as his ultimate fear, theorizing that it would lead to a society that produces “forgetfulness in the souls of those who have learned it” (Weisgerber & Butler, 2016). Plato’s argument was in retaliation to the act of writing, which he thought of as “a bastard form of discourse” and which he ultimately rejected as a replacement and substitute for human memory (Weisgerber & Butler, 2016). If he could see the world in which we operate today, documenting our lives via social media platforms and where, as Wegner and Ward (2013) suggest, we have in fact begun to become hybrid minds relying on these external information sources in place of our own memories, what would he make of the human condition? Plato’s fears are also supported by research conducted by Carr (2010), who suggests that memory is the tool which shapes the ‘self’, which in turn “shapes and sustains the collective memory”, ultimately positing that if we “outsource memory...culture will wither” (Peters, 2011). Given our disruptive environment and with the dangers of outsourcing our memory to these platforms supported by many

researchers, it is difficult to support the findings that this outsourcing of memory will aid in the development of the 'self'.

The storing of the historical 'self' externally in our social media through the process of 'huponemnemata' can also be intrinsically linked to the second significant function within identity creation; self-reflection. This "writing of the self" (Weisgerber & Butler, 2016) is so prevalent in today's society that, according to Foucault, the opportunity for self-connection should be present in every moment we spend curating and collecting this online 'self'. However, just as with the research conducted by Wegner and Ward, the validity of Foucault's theory is impacted by the disruptive environment of our social world. Although the expansive information source that the social web provides is far greater than that identified in Foucault's theory, his premise was determined by the ability to physically take time to write and collect ideas. As posited above however, we are constantly and consistently bombarded with new thoughts, ideas and innovations via our devices allowing very little time for self-reflection. Lovink (2017) highlights the frenzied environment in which we operate, highlighting how social media platforms "plunge us into a state of stupor". We are constantly being introduced to new applications and products "that elegantly make us forget yesterday's flavor of the day. We simply click, tap and drag the platform away, finding something else to distract us. Within weeks we have forgotten the icon, bookmark, or password" (Lovink, 2017). Foucault posits that the ability to self-reflect within this collection process is vital to the growth of 'self' and in this world of constant entertainment, chatter and distraction this process is lost as we move from one task to the next, chasing efficiency and fresh content (Weisgerber & Butler, 2016). Foucault was not the first theorist to postulate this, as the ability for self-reflection is also central to Nietzsche's theory on identity construction (Katsafanas, 2012). One's ability to self-reflect is the innate quality that allows us self-awareness, giving us the capacity for the construction of the 'self' through self-assessment and subsequent changing of behaviors leading to growth (Katsafanas, 2012). Also at the basis of Turkle's (2003) analysis of online social experiences, taking time for self-reflection was concluded to be the most important aspect of our relationships with these technologies as we move forward into full technological immersion. Finally, Plato theorized that the only 'worthwhile attentional form is anamnesis – thinking within oneself"

(Weisgerber & Butler, 2016) and as this ability is posited above to be increasingly difficult within today's society it begs the question as to how this fundamental shift in the creation of self will ultimately impact society. If we are no longer in an environment where self-reflection is possible then we are removed from a fundamental process that allows for the development of 'self'.

Aside from the disruptive and confusing environment, there is another major issue with Foucault's theory. Ultimately, *huponememata* was hypothesized as a 'personal exercise' which should be 'done by and for oneself' (Weisgerber & Butler, 2016). However, according to most research regarding social media interactivity (Fisher et al. (2016), Goodings, Locke & Brown (2007)) most behavior carried out on these sites are active impression management for others. Psychologist Jim Taylor has suggested that our culture of social media has driven us away from "self-expression and self-awareness" and towards a society of "impression management and self-promotion" (Taylor, 2011). Worryingly, he speculates that this fundamental change is happening slowly and without our express knowledge, using the disturbing analogy of a "frog that does not sense it is going to die if placed in water that is heated slowly" (Taylor, 2011). Ultimately, our innate identity is becoming externalized, constructed from the feedback of an inherently flawed social system rather than the traditional internally derived identity that was experienced in the generations before.

In examination of the social of things, Jackson brings together the studies of Marx 1964, Appadurai 1986, Hopkins, 1998, Hornborg 2001 and Miller 1991 to highlight the "complex ways in which objects become personalized and persons become objectified in the course of social life" (Jackson, 2002). In our increasingly social world, this seems to predict the future of our social 'self'. As we inherently become more social beings, preferring the comfort of online communication and freedom of expression, the way in which we are now constructing the 'self' appears to be facilitating the personalization of our devices and the objectification of each other (Turkle, 2003). Keen (2012) warns that if we continue on this path we will end up in a society characterized by the "loneliness of the isolated man in the connected crowd" (Lovink, 2012). Perhaps as a result of the loss of self-reflection, rather than becoming more connected to our 'self' we are in fact, becoming more disconnected. Although social media

does provide us with the opportunity to for connection and strengthening of our sense of 'self', unless we begin to implement ways to incorporate self-reflection into our online activity, the benefits of these sites will ultimately be undermined by our misuse of them. It is up to us as individuals to learn how to interact with technology in such a way as to utilize its benefits without losing what makes us inherently human. Ultimately, this hypothesis is intrinsically linked to the role agency plays within these platforms and consequently this will be examined in the following section.

AGENCY WITHIN SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

As explored above, there are many facets that construct society's relationship with technology, particularly within the various aspects of social media platforms. With the fundamental changes that are taking place within each individual as a result of technological internalization, it is now pertinent to investigate the question of agency within these environments.

Firstly, the ways in which the design and structure of our social media environments impact an individual's agency will be examined. As highlighted throughout this paper, our internalization of technology is foundationally linked to our social interaction with it and through it. Although the process of attributing social characteristics to these objects is postulated above to be innate to human nature, it is pertinent to identify the agency that exists within this connection, i.e. whether individuals are actively creating these human associations or if they are developing without active awareness from the individual. Within this context, researchers such as Nass and Moon (2000) and Sundar (2008) have explored the consciousness of this attribution (Wang et al., 2017). Their research found that the social treatment of our devices is ultimately 'subconscious' rather than 'mindful' in nature (Wang et al., 2017), developing and becoming more automatic the longer our association with the device. Furthermore, Carter and Grover (2015) highlight research by Schwarz and Chin (2007) that the more individuals incorporate technological tools into their emotional and psychological self the more "the individual yields authority to the IT object". This finding is

significant as it suggests that individuals have now begun to internalize these devices so naturally that they are not even aware that such a connection has taken place - leading to the deduction that agency over our social relationship with technology does not exist and as we continually become more immersed in our technological world, rather than residing with the individual, true agency is increasingly being transferred to our technological devices and the worlds that are constructed within them.

The implicit use of algorithms designed to keep individuals within a content bubble that indoctrinates them within the confines of their own ideas has a vast impact on the agency of the user. Individuals rather than creating their own online world, have their worlds are curated and bounded based on an identity of the 'self' constructed by the creators of these sites (Pariser, 2011). Pariser (2011) highlights how the dangers of these edited versions of the world come as most individual online are not aware of the fact that their worlds are tailored specifically for them. Born out of this 'ignorance' of the true construction of their world, agency within this context is transferred from the individual over to the developers of these platforms.

The design process is further utilized by the developers of these sites in order to encourage the adoption of their platforms. Building on research which posits the importance of agency as a motivating factor for the use of these online platforms, Gangadharbatla (2008) has highlighted that adoption rates are positively correlated with an individual's "confidence in their ability to successfully understand, navigate and evaluate content online". Likewise, Jackson (2002) suggests that adoption rates specifically depend on "how much we feel we understand it and how much control we feel we have over it". Both studies indicate that the more agency a user perceives to have within an online environment the more likely their adoption of that platform, regardless of the actual agency the user has. It is therefore in the interest of the developers of these sites to include features that give the user a sense of agency in an environment where, ultimately as emphasized through this section, many of the environmental features that shape the 'self' are out of their control.

This agency that is afforded to the user by the creators of these sites comes in the form of the freedom of expression which is innate within social media platforms. This allows for a large amount of agency to be felt by individuals within the virtual representation of the 'self',

as they have the ability to represent themselves free of the constraints of reality. However, although individuals are afforded the opportunity to construct any version of the 'self' that they wish, in actuality, once the 'self' is created online, individuals enter into a feedback process where ultimately the individual's agency within the representation of the 'self' is undermined and inadvertently given over to the 'others' within the social network. Research by Belk (2016) highlights his concern regarding this process, as he suggests that due to the nature of this loop we are at risk of giving control of the 'self' to the 'others' with whom we are interacting. Although, agency is ultimately given to our social group, it can be argued that one aspect of true agency remains within the first iteration of the 'self' on these social media sites. Yet to have been influenced by the online feedback loop, this 'self' is one where the individual has most agency in its construction. Overall however, this true agency is ultimately superseded by the transferal of the agency within the development of the 'self' over to 'others' in the social networks in which we operate.

Through the above analysis it is postulated that, although the individuals have the capacity to exert agency within these platforms exists within the opportunity to create a version of the 'self' in whichever way they please, the structures and design of these environments ultimately mean that individuals exert very little agency within these environments.

To offer a contrasting argument to the above, empirically within identity construction theory the fundamental concept of agency can be related to the process of self-reflection. Research by Katsafanas (2012) highlights that within the traditional perspectives of identity, many scholars have linked agency to "the capacity for reflection", citing that the loss of this ability that has been highlighted above is leading to an ignorance within the 'self'. This convenes effectively with the above analysis of the narcissistic nature of our online worlds and adds to the argument of the lack of self-awareness that is an inherent feature within these online interactions. Nietzsche was one prominent theorist who constructed his theory on identity around the premise of agency, postulating that individuals must have a sense of self awareness in order to exert genuine agency (Katsafanas, 2012) and ultimately that "if an agent is ignorant of his action, then the appearance of agency is illusory" (Katsafanas, 2012). Within this framework, control is inextricably linked to agency and according to Nietzsche, as

we lose our ability for self-reflection, we are in turn losing an aspect of control over our actions (Katsafanas (2012)).

Whilst both of the above arguments claim the lack of agency that individuals have within online contexts, Nietzsche's argument suggests, conversely to the first, that rather than arising out of the actual control that individuals have over these environments, true agency and control are functions of self-awareness and self-reflection. Although Nietzsche stated that control is "threatened" by a self-ignorance born out of a loss of self-reflection within these sites, Katsafanas (2012) also cites that Nietzsche recognized that "self-regulation is not something attained immediately". This implies that even as we have yet to develop social structures online that inherently have self-reflective tendencies, these processes could be developed over time as long more attention is given to the importance of these processes as we continue to interact and develop these platforms. Vital to this, as deduced from the preceding analysis, is the need for individuals to become aware of their actions and through this we can reclaim our not only a better sense of our identity but also agency within this emerging sociotechnical setting.

CONCLUSION

This paper explored the various ways in which technology and the new sociotechnical environment is affecting the traditional aspects of identity construction. Through the modification of the functions of memory, self-reflection and conventional social interactions it has been found that we are increasingly becoming more dependent and intrinsically linked to our devices and the social aspects of this new culture. As we increasingly become more hybrid beings, informed and influenced by our social networking platforms, it is argued that we are becoming dependent on the social relationship with our devices and online connections, internalizing these devices and environments to become extensions of the 'self'. Ultimately, through the above analysis it is found that our online environments are facilitating the enhancement of our narcissistic qualities and the cultivation of a 'self' that is intrinsically dictated by external 'others', where the traditionally internal influences on the 'self' are becoming externalized and our sense of agency is considered 'illusory'.

Jackson (2002) suggests that an inherent part of "human relationships [is that] the other is potentially a source of fulfilment and of frustration". Intrinsic in this idea is the "struggle" which Jackson posits as a natural way of being, with "every situation [having] the possibility of giving us life or taking it away". This naturally reflects the situation present in our relationship with technology. On one hand it provides a new freedom of expression and unprecedented opportunities for self-reflection, which under traditional theories, should enhance our sense of 'self'. On the other hand, as described, these worlds are plunging us into an environment that is heavily curated, where the 'self' is driven by narcissistic and ego-driven tendencies and where our sense of agency is illusory. This 'struggle' is the very line that we must tread when we look forward into the future of technology. On one hand giving us connection to others, access to information and a range of beneficial opportunities but on the other we teeter on the edge of disconnection with self and over reliance on virtual relationships and devices over which we have little control. As our relationship with technology deepens, an awareness of the true essence of these technologies must be developed. The ability for self-reflection is one innate quality that is linked to both identity construction and agency, and as such the processes of which we as individuals must learn to

employ within our social media environments if we are to develop an improved relationship with our online worlds. Even if ultimately we cannot control these environments or the interactions that take place online, we can at least, through a process of self-reflection and self-awareness reclaim our sense of agency and ultimately utilize technology in order to better construct our sense of 'self', 'other' and the world.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ahadzadeh, A, Pahlevan Sharif, S, & Ong, F 2017, 'Full length article: Self-schema and self-discrepancy mediate the influence of Instagram usage on body image satisfaction among youth', *Computers In Human Behavior*, 68, pp. 8-16, ScienceDirect, EBSCOhost

Aladwani, A, & Almarzouq, M 2016, 'Full length article: Understanding compulsive social media use: The premise of complementing self-conceptions mismatch with technology', *Computers In Human Behavior*, 60, pp. 575-581, ScienceDirect, EBSCOhost

Amiel, T, & Sargent, S 2004, 'Individual differences in Internet usage motives', *Computers In Human Behavior*, 20, pp. 711-726, ScienceDirect, EBSCOhost

Andreassen, C, Pallesen, S, & Griffiths, M 2017, 'The relationship between addictive use of social media, narcissism, and self-esteem: Findings from a large national survey', *Addictive Behaviors*, 64, pp. 287-293, ScienceDirect, EBSCOhost

Bareket-Bojmel, L, Moran, S, & Shahar, G 2016, 'Full length article: Strategic self-presentation on Facebook: Personal motives and audience response to online behavior', *Computers In Human Behavior*, 55, Part B, pp. 788-795, ScienceDirect, EBSCOhost

Belk, R 2016, 'Extended self and the digital world', *Current Opinion In Psychology*, 10, Consumer behavior, pp. 50-54, ScienceDirect, EBSCOhost

Berzonsky, MD 2016, 'An exploration of personal assumptions about self-construction and self-discovery', *Identity: An International Journal Of Theory And Research*, 16, 4, pp. 267-281, PsycINFO, EBSCOhost, viewed 29 April 2017.

Burke, M., Kraut, R., & Marlow, C., 2011, 'Social capital on Facebook: Differentiating uses and users. In Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems', (pp. 571–580). New York; *ACM Press*

Capurro, Rafael, 1996, "Information Technology and Technologies of the self", *Journal of Information Ethics*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 19-28

Carr, N. G., 2010. *The shallows: what the Internet is doing to our brains*. New York, W.W. Norton

Carter, M, 2015, 'ME, MY SELF, AND I(T): CONCEPTUALIZING INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY IDENTITY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS', *MIS Quarterly*, 39, 4, pp. 931-957, Business Source Complete, EBSCOhost

Case, Amber, 2010, "We are all cyborgs now", TEDWomen 2010, 7.53,
https://www.ted.com/talks/amber_case_we_are_all_cyborgs_now

Christine Rosen, 2007, "Virtual Friendship and the New Narcissism," *The New Atlantis*, Number 17, pp. 15-31.

Cisco Mobile VNI, 2017, "Cisco Visual Networking Index: Global Mobile Data Traffic Forecast Update, 2016–2021 White Paper", *Cisco*, Document ID 1454457600805266

Cohen, D, 2017, "How Much Time Will the Average Person Spend on Social Media During Their Life?", *Adweek*, Social Pro Daily

Fischetti, M 2014, 'THE NETWORKED PRIMATE', *Scientific American*, 311, 3, pp. 82-85, Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost

Fisher, M, Boland, J, & Lyytinen, K 2016, 'Social networking as the production and consumption of a self', *Information And Organization*, 26, pp. 131-145, ScienceDirect, EBSCOhost

Gangadharbatla, H 2008, 'Facebook Me: Collective Self-Esteem, Need to Belong, and Internet Self-Efficacy as Predictors of the iGeneration's Attitudes toward Social Networking Sites', *Journal Of Interactive Advertising*, 8, 2, pp. 1-28, Business Source Complete, EBSCOhost

Goodings, L, Locke, A, & Brown, S 2007, 'Social networking technology: place and identity in mediated communities', *Journal Of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 17, 6, pp. 463-476, Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost

Howard, J., 2000, 'Social Psychology of Identities', *Annual Social Review*, 26, pp. 367-93

Hu, C, Zhao, L, & Huang, J 2015, 'Achieving self-congruency? Examining why individuals reconstruct their virtual identity in communities of interest established within social network platforms', *Computers In Human Behavior*, 50, pp. 465-475, ScienceDirect, EBSCOhost

Iqani, M, & Schroeder, J 2016, '#selfie: digital self-portraits as commodity form and consumption practice', *Consumption, Markets & Culture*, 19, 5, p. 405, Publisher Provided Full Text Searching File, EBSCOhost

Jackson, M 2002, 'Familiar And Foreign Bodies: A Phenomenological Exploration Of The Human-Technology Interface', *Journal Of The Royal Anthropological Institute*, 8, 2, p. 333, Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost

James, William, 1890, "The principles of psychology", *Dover Publications*, Chapter 10

Jang, K, Park, N, & Song, H 2016, 'Full length article: Social comparison on Facebook: Its antecedents and psychological outcomes', *Computers In Human Behavior*, 62, pp. 147-154, ScienceDirect, EBSCOhost

Karapanos, E, Teixeira, P, & Gouveia, R 2016, 'Full length article: Need fulfillment and experiences on social media: A case on Facebook and WhatsApp', *Computers In Human Behavior*, 55, Part B, pp. 888-897, ScienceDirect, EBSCOhost

Katsafanas, Pp 2012, 'Nietzsche on Agency and Self-Ignorance', *Journal Of Nietzsche Studies*, 43, pp. 5-17, Humanities Full Text (H.W. Wilson), EBSCOhost

Keating, R, Hendy, H, & Can, S 2016, 'Full length article: Demographic and psychosocial variables associated with good and bad perceptions of social media use', *Computers In Human Behavior*, 57, pp. 93-98, ScienceDirect, EBSCOhost

Kim, Y, & Sundar, S 2012, 'Anthropomorphism of computers: Is it mindful or mindless?', *Computers In Human Behavior*, 28, pp. 241-250, ScienceDirect, EBSCOhost

Kornstein, S., 2015, "The Rise of Mobile Phones: 20 Years of Global Adoption", *Cartesian*

Kraut, R, Burke, M, 2015, 'Internet Use and Psychological Well-Being: Effects of Activity and Audience', *Communications Of The ACM*, 58, 12, pp. 94-100, Business Source Complete, EBSCOhost

Ksinan, A, & Vazsonyi, A 2016, 'Narcissism, Internet, and social relations: A study of two tales', *Personality And Individual Differences*, 94, pp. 118-123, ScienceDirect, EBSCOhost

- Lee, E, Kim, Y, & Ahn, J 2014, 'How do people use Facebook features to manage social capital?', *Computers In Human Behavior*, 36, pp. 440-445, ScienceDirect, EBSCOhost
- Lopatin, P, 2012, "Friendship Does Not Compute," *The New Atlantis*, Number 35, pp. 125-133.
- Lovink, G., 2017, *What Is the Social in Social Media? - Journal #40 December 2012 - e-flux*. [online] E-flux.com. Available at: <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/40/60272/what-is-the-social-in-social-media/>
- Lyu, SO 2016, 'Travel selfies on social media as objectified self-presentation', *Tourism Management*, 54, pp. 185-195, ScienceDirect, EBSCOhost
- Matic, I 2011, 'The Social Construction of Mediated Experience and Self Identity in Social Networking', *International Journal Of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences*, 5, 11, pp. 13-21, Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost
- Mehrabian, A., 1972, "Nonverbal Communication", *Transaction Publishers*, Chapter 10, pp. 182
- Meshi, D, Tamir, D, & Heekeren, H 2015, 'The Emerging Neuroscience of Social Media', *Trends In Cognitive Sciences*, 19, 12, pp. 771-782, PsycINFO, EBSCOhost
- Pariser, E, 2011, "Beware online "filter bubbles", *TED2011*, 9.04, available at: https://www.ted.com/playlists/26/our_digital_lives
- Peters, Luka, March 2011, "Nicholas Carr's, *The Shallows*. What the Internet is Doing to our Brain and some implications for Net based learning", *elearningeuropa*, p. 1
- Scott W., C 2015, 'Mobile communication and network privatism: A literature review of the implications for diverse, weak, and new ties', *Review Of Communication Research*, Vol 3, Iss 1, Pp 1-21 (2015), 1, p. 1, Directory of Open Access Journals, EBSCOhost
- Stald, Gitte. "Mobile Identity: Youth, Identity, and Mobile Communication Media." Youth, Identity, and Digital Media. Edited by David Buckingham. The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Media and Learning. Cambridge, MA: *The MIT Press*, 2008. 143–164

Statista.com, 2017, "Daily time spent on social networking by internet users worldwide from 2012 to 2016 (in minutes)", *Statista*

Swann, W, Pelham, B, & Krull, D, 1989, 'AGREEABLE FANCY OR DISAGREEABLE TRUTH - RECONCILING SELF-ENHANCEMENT AND SELF-VERIFICATION', *Journal Of Personality And Social Psychology*, 57, 5, pp. 782-791, Social Sciences Citation Index, EBSCOhost

Tagg, C., Seargeant, P., 2014, "The Language of Social Media: identity and community on the Internet", *Palgrave Macmillan*, pp. 1-50

Taylor, J., 2011, 'Technology: Is Technology Stealing Our (Self) Identities?', *Psychology Today*, The Power of Prime, available at <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-power-prime/201107/technology-is-technology-stealing-our-self-identities>

Turkle, S, 2003, 'Technology and Human Vulnerability', *Harvard Business Review*, 81, 9, pp. 43-50, Business Source Complete, EBSCOhost

Turkle, S 2005, 'Chapter 8: Thinking of Yourself as a Machine', *Second Self*, p. 247, Publisher Provided Full Text Searching File, EBSCOhost

Turkle, S 2012, "Connected, but alone?", *TED2012*, 19.48, https://www.ted.com/playlists/26/our_digital_lives

van Dijck, J n.d., "You have one identity': performing the self on Facebook and LinkedIn", *Media Culture & Society*, 35, 2, pp. 199-215, Social Sciences Citation Index, EBSCOhost

Vishwanath, A, & Chen, H 2008, 'Personal communication technologies as an extension of the self: A cross-cultural comparison of people's associations with technology and their symbolic proximity with others', *Journal Of The American Society For Information Science & Technology*, 59, 11, pp. 1761-1775, Business Source Complete, EBSCOhost

Vossen, H, & Valkenburg, P 2016, 'Full length article: Do social media foster or curtail adolescents' empathy? A longitudinal study', *Computers In Human Behavior*, ScienceDirect, EBSCOhost

Waisman, S, 2008, "We Are the Change We've Been Waiting For," *The New Atlantis*, Number 21,, pp. 81-85

Wang, W 2017, 'Full length article: Smartphones as Social Actors? Social dispositional factors in assessing anthropomorphism', *Computers In Human Behavior*, 68, pp. 334-344, ScienceDirect, EBSCOhost

Wegner, D, & Ward, A 2013, 'How Google Is Changing Your Brain', *Scientific American*, 309, 6, pp. 58-61, *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost

Weisgerber, C, & Butler, S 2016, 'Curating the Soul: Foucault's concept of hupomnemata and the digital technology of self-care', *Information, Communication & Society*, 19, 10, p. 1340, Publisher Provided Full Text Searching File, EBSCOhost

White, P., 2014, "The Introduction of Social Media and its impact on Identity Construction", available at: <https://prezi.com/esyd90erfu4n/the-impact-of-social-media-on-identity-construction/>

Zhao, S, Grasmuck, S, & Martin, J 2008, 'Identity construction on Facebook: Digital empowerment in anchored relationships', *Computers In Human Behavior*, 24, Including the Special Issue: Internet Empowerment, pp. 1816-1836, ScienceDirect, EBSCOhost

Złotowski, J, Yogeewaran, K, & Bartneck, C 2017, 'Can we control it? Autonomous robots threaten human identity, uniqueness, safety, and resources', *International Journal Of Human - Computer Studies*, 100, pp. 48-54, ScienceDirect, EBSCOhost