

“Social media can affect wellbeing both negatively and positively”

A Q methodology study exploring adolescent experiences of using social media

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Finally, for teens everywhere:

*You should know you're beautiful just the way you are  
And you don't have to change a thing, the world could change its heart*

Alessia Cara (2015)

**Abstract**

Findings from the literature review indicated that there is an association between social media use and mental health difficulties. However, research into the impact of social media use and mental health difficulties in adolescents aged 13-16 within the UK is limited, studies that include the voice of the young people are even more limited.

The aims of this study were to consider how young people, aged 13-16, view Social Media and how it impacts on their well-being. In the main I aimed to find out what young people think needs to change about social media in order to minimise the negative impact, or maximise the positive impact on their well-being, as a result capturing the views of young people on an issue that is prominent in today’s society. On account of my aspirations to include the voice of adolescents in the research, and in order to explore the complexities of using social media on adolescent mental health, it was identified that Q methodology was the most appropriate method to use. Subsequently, Q methodology was used to investigate how 37 adolescents (aged 13-16) ranked 49 statements relating to their experiences of using social media. The statements were sorted by participants from most agree to most disagree according to individual preference. The resulting configuration of statements generated by the participants was analysed using factor extraction, this yielded a five factor solution, with interpreted factors (viewpoints) named as: *‘Using social media puts pressure on body image and how you feel you should live your life; safe use of social media should be taught’, ‘Using social media is important for connecting with others and is entertaining. It is not a problem for me; in fact, it makes me feel good!’, ‘Using social media affects my relationships with others, makes me feel judged, and makes it easier to get bullied’, ‘Using social media is a problem for me; it makes me feel judged and I cannot express my ‘true’ self on there’,* and *‘Using social media is addictive and should be moderated more effectively’.*

The findings are discussed in relation to existing literature and the potential next steps of individuals, schools, parents, social media platforms, and professionals, particularly Educational Psychologists, are considered including the development of a Social Media Support Screening Tool. Within the final chapter limitations of the present research are acknowledged, with suggestions and recommendations made for future research.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

The aim of this research was to explore the experiences that adolescents have whilst using social media platforms (Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter) and the impact that these experiences may have on their mental health and wellbeing, whilst also aiming to establish what could be done to improve their experiences of using social media.

The term “mental health” was explored as part of the literature review and a definition from the World Health Organisation was used to qualify the term in relation to this study. As detailed within the definition “Mental Health” is a state of wellbeing. Both the terms “mental health” and “mental wellbeing” are used throughout this study, with “mental health” referring to medically diagnosable conditions, such as depression, and “mental wellbeing” referring to adolescents’ ability to cope with the day to day stresses that using social media can bring.

I chose to explore the impact that social media has on the mental wellbeing of adolescents and how these experiences could be improved for a number of reasons; firstly there has been an influx of reports in the mainstream media about the damage that social media is having on young people, with platforms such as Instagram being apportioned blame for young people dying by suicide due to negative experiences they were having online. Furthermore, with the ever increasing advances that technology and social media are making, our understanding of how young people experience social media, and the impact this has on their mental health and wellbeing, needs to develop in order to support this. In addition to this, I felt that there was a high level of media hype about the negative impact on young people’s mental health and wellbeing in terms of depression, self-harm, and suicide due to negative online experiences, but very little in terms of recommendations on how young people can be supported to manage these negative emotions and experiences, other than that of telling them to stop using social media platforms. Finally, social media use was a topic that was consistently being raised as a cause for concerns in schools. Within my role as a trainee Educational Psychologist I had been involved in casework with young people who were struggling with negative mental wellbeing due to negative experiences whilst using social media. This led me to question how well equipped schools and other professionals are to manage this and support young people with social media use effectively.

The current study initially explores the existing literature and other sources that discuss the impact that using social media is having on the mental health and wellbeing of adults, with subsequent discussions about the impact on adolescents. Following this a detailed chapter outlines my philosophical position as a researcher and the methodology used (Q methodology) as the tool for this research. Within the procedures chapter a detailed outline of how participants were recruited, and how the data was gathered will be explained, followed by the results chapter which depicts the research findings. The final discussion chapter will critique the research findings in relation to existing literature, underlining the implications for professional practice.

By eliciting the views of the adolescents within the research it is hoped that it will provide a deeper understanding of what can be done to support those whose mental wellbeing has been negatively affected through using social media platforms.

# Chapter 2: Critical Literature Review

## 2.1. Introduction

This chapter will explore the current literature and discourse surrounding the impact that using social media platforms can have on mental health, a definition of mental health will be explored, alongside the role of social media and the way in which the platforms are intended to be used, what is meant by the term young people and the importance of their voice in research. The impact of social media use on mental health will be discussed in relation to adults and young people and associated themes which emerge from the literature. Followed by a statement of the problem, finally the aims and purpose of the research will be discussed alongside the research questions to be addressed.

## 2.2. Mental Health: Definitions

There are many definitions of Mental Health readily available, in terms of this research the definition from the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2014) will be used to explain the term Mental Health. According to WHO Mental Health is defined as:

A state of wellbeing in which each individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her own community.

(WHO, 2014)

The WHO further state that mental health is an integral and essential component of health more broadly encompassing this within a wider definition of health:

Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of mental disorders or disabilities.

(WHO, 2018)

This definition is appropriate to this research due to the wider connotations that social media is impacting on people’s abilities to “cope with the normal stresses of life”.

## 2.3. Social media Platforms and their intended use

When considering the social media platforms to be considered as part of the study, research from NSPCC (2019) on the most popular sites were considered, as well as the information I had gained from casework as part of my role as a trainee Educational Psychologist. From this it was decided that when discussing social media platforms, I would be referring to Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. A brief overview of each of these platforms and their intended use will follow based on information from the platforms and Net-aware.org.uk devised by the NSPCC in collaboration with the O2 network (NSPCC, 2019). As part of the research undertaken by the NSPCC and O2, each social media platform was given a ranking in terms of risk related to content that parents and young people had seen. The level of risk as reported by the NSPCC is based on the percentage of participants in the survey who reported seeing risk related content, such as sexual or violent content. The ratings given by the NSPCC are: Low Risk (less than 5%); Medium Risk (between 5 and 25%); and High Risk (over 25%) (NSPCC, 2019).

### 2.3.1. Facebook

Facebook helps you connect and share with the people in your life

(Facebook, 2019)

Facebook is a social networking site that lets users create a page about themselves, including adding friends, writing on other people’s pages, sharing photos and videos, gaming and live streaming, and sending messages to groups or individuals through the affiliated Messenger app (NSPCC, 2019a). Facebook has varying levels of security measures in place, which are chosen and adopted by the user, according to the NSPCC website net-aware, Facebook is classed as a high risk (more than 25% of reported users within the research reported seeing this content) social media platform for the following types of content: sexual, violence and hatred, bullying, suicide and self-harm, and drink, drugs and crime.

### 2.3.2. Instagram

A simple, fun & creative way to capture, edit & share photos, videos & messages with friends & family.

(Google, 2019a)

Instagram users can post content using hashtags to share experiences, thoughts and memories within an online community. Users can also follow family, friends, celebrities, and companies. Instagram users can also share and watch live streaming (NSPCC, 2019b). Instagram has varying levels of security in place as set by the user and is ranked as medium risk (5-25% of users viewing the content) for violence and hatred, suicide and self-harm, and drink, drugs and crime, and high risk for sexual and bullying content.

### 2.3.3. Snapchat

Snapchat lets you easily talk with friends, view Live Stories from around the world, and explore news in Discover. Life's more fun when you live in the moment!

(Google, 2019b)

Snapchat allows users to send a photo, short video, or message to people in their contacts. The sent ‘snap’ appears for up to 10 seconds, or there is an option to have no time limit on the snap. There is also a Snapchat Stories feature that allows users share snaps in a sequence for up to 24 hours (NSPCC, 2019c). Snapchat’s security features are set by the users. According to the NSPCC (2019c) Snapchat has been deemed high risk for sexual and bullying content, and medium risk for content relating to violence and hatred, suicide and self-harm, and drink, drugs and crime.

### 2.3.4. Twitter

Follow your interests.

Hear what people are talking about.

Join the conversation.

Twitter (2019)

Twitter is a social media site and app that allows users to post public messages called tweets. These tweets can be up to 280 characters long. Users can also send private messages; post pictures and videos, celebrities and companies can also have Twitter accounts NSPCC (2019d). Twitter’s security features are set by the user after they have joined. The NSPCC (2019d) rated Twitter as high risk for sexual, violence and hatred, and bullying content, and medium risk for suicide and self-harm, and drink, drugs and crime content.

### 2.3.5. YouTube

Enjoy the videos and music you love, upload original content, and share it all with friends, family, and the world on YouTube.

Google (2019c)

YouTube allows users to watch, create and comment on videos. Users can create their own YouTube account, create a music playlist, and create their own channel, meaning they will have a public profile, YouTube also allows live streaming. YouTube’s privacy features are set by the user upon creating an account, however there is minimal security features in terms of viewing public content. YouTube has been deemed as high risk for the following content: sexual, violence and hatred, bullying, suicide and self-harm, and drink, drugs and crime (NSPCC, 2019e).

## 2.4. Why Young People?

When considering the age range of participants used within this study I was keen to address the gaps in research into the impact social media has on mental health. As will be discussed further within this chapter, the gap within the research appeared to be that which includes young people aged 11-16. As an Educational Psychologist I felt it was important to establish the value that research with this age range would provide and consider whether their developmental stage would fit with research of this nature. This led me to briefly explore adolescence as a developmental phase and consider the importance of including the voice of young people within research.

### 2.4.1. Adolescence

The World Health Organisation (WHO, 2019) identifies several key points that would indicate that a child has entered the adolescent phase of development. Numerically adolescence typically begins around the age of 11, reaching adulthood (according to the UK) at 18 years old. Although the WHO would argue that chronological age only gives an indicator that children may be entering adolescence, and that adolescence encompasses so much more than a number. In essence, adolescence is a time where children transition from childhood to adulthood and where a development of knowledge and skills, managing of emotions and relationships, and acquiring abilities that will be essential for later development of adult roles, take place.

Adolescence is a significant developmental stage in that children begin to develop their sense of self. According to Nakkula and Toshalis (2007) during adolescence it is thought that a shift in cognitive development takes place, where adolescents develop an increased capacity for rational and complex thinking, possessing the skills necessary to interpret their worlds in new and interesting ways. Livingstone et al. (2017) also identified that young people aged 10-13 are moving towards a more adult way of thinking describing adolescence as “crucially a time of exploration and experimentation” (pg. 89), with the internet providing the opportunity for adolescents to carry out this exploration.

As early as 2007 when social media was far more limited to adolescents than it is today, Nakkula & Toshalis (2007) argued that the media has a profound effect on adolescents’ understanding of themselves and the world. With the media providing dominant images of what it means to be a child, a teen, an adult, homosexual, heterosexual etc.

Livingstone et al., (2017) looked at the age of children and adolescents and the risk factors that they may encounter whilst using the internet. Livingstone et al. (2017) suggest that adolescents aged between 10 and 13, are beginning to identify social pressures and, in order to feel accepted and fit in with peers, are likely to change aspects of their personality and appearance, beginning to recognise, with caution, that there is the opportunity for risk taking and exploration online. Aged 14-18, Livingstone et al. explain that adolescents are undergoing significant neurological and psychological changes leading them to different perceptions of emotions and decision making. Neurologically, brain development changes during this period may make it more likely for adolescents to engage in risk taking behaviour online and encounter more difficulties with interpersonal relationships and mental health. It is within this phase that adolescents begin to take note of the number of followers and likes that they gain whilst using social media and continue to alter their appearance and personality to harbour more likes and followers. Throughout adolescence, young people are also beginning to navigate more complex social relationships and develop a growing reliance on their peers for their self-worth, with an increased focus on peer status approval. It is possible that during this phase of development adolescents peer valued behaviour outweighs logic, which can influence their online behaviour (Nesi, Choukas-Bradley & Prinstein, 2018; Livingstone, et al., 2017).

The developmental changes that occur during adolescence is significant in navigating all areas of their life, however, without a full understanding of how they experience their online worlds it remains difficult to support difficulties associated with their social media use. Thus, begins the rationale for including adolescents within the current research.

### 2.4.2. Why is it important to include young people in research?

There are many neurodevelopmental, emotional, social, and cognitive changes that take place in adolescent development. In this phase young people begin to develop more effective reasoning skills, logical and higher moral thinking, they also become more capable of abstract thought and making rational judgements (WHO, 2019). This alone gives justification to include adolescents in research, as if we miss the opportunity to gain their views on matters that can affect their development; we miss opportunities to educate them on the potential risks of social media use and what they can do to protect themselves from harm whilst using social media.

Furthermore, research has found that involving students in making decisions that impact their health and education can benefit their emotional health and wellbeing. Research also suggests that by involving young people in research it helps them to feel part of the school and community, and gives them a sense of control over their lives, therefore improving outcomes. In that respect students should be seen as a source of knowledge and expertise on matters that directly impact on them (Lavis & Robson, 2015). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) promotes giving a *‘child who is capable of forming his or her views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child’* (United Nations 1989, Articles 12 and 13, pg. 2).

Not only is it essential to include adolescents in research, Nakkula & Toshalis (2007 pg.3) argued that “adolescents’ theoretical imaginations offer some of the richest, most critical and deeply hopeful worldviews we might find”, it is the responsibility of those working with them, teachers, parents, professionals etc., to ensure that we are able to offer support and guidance. Through our own experiences of engaging with the world, we are equipped to offer adolescents advice when they begin to question what sort of person they should be, who their friends should be, and what their worlds should be like. The way in which we discuss these theoretical dilemmas can co-construct who they become and the way in which they approach the world (Nakkula & Toshalis, 2007). For me, if we are unable to understand a part of their world that we as professionals have not experienced, it is our responsibility to seek knowledge on the subject in order to provide guidance. What better way to seek that knowledge than to ask the adolescents themselves about their experiences by including them within research.

## 2.5. Initial literature search

In order to review the existing literature pertaining to the impact of social media use on adolescent mental health, I began by simply Googling the phrase “social media and mental health”. Initially this returned over 300,000 results. I then refined my search to information produced within the last two years as I wanted to get a general overview on what mainstream media was saying regarding the topic. Following this I used Google Scholar and the University’s online library system to find academic papers relating to social media use and mental health. Within the papers I read I came across additional useful references and would occasionally follow a trail to more recent information. I then began to notice that the information I was reading mostly pertained to adult social media use, so I repeated the process by searching the term “social media and adolescent mental health” and again taking threads and looking for academic papers through Google Scholar and the University library.

When undertaking the literature review two key terms emerged when looking at using the Internet for social interaction: Social media and Social Networking Sites. In order to fully understand the distinction, if there was one, I felt it would be useful to look at exploring the two terms; however research into the difference is minimal. Cohn (2017) offers the following distinctions: social networking sites are the use of web-based and mobile technologies to turn communication into an interactive dialogue; social media, on the other hand, is a social structure with people who are joined by a common interest. Studies within the literature review appear to use these terms to mean the same thing, therefore, in order to develop a sense of cohesion and as I am focused on how these interactive dialogues impact on mental health, I have chosen to use the term social media throughout.

Social media usage is prevalent in today’s society and according to the office for national statistics (2017) 96% of people aged 16-24 uses the internet for social media (e.g. Facebook or Twitter) and 90% of households have access to the internet. This has increased by over 45% since 2004. The Government published the Internet Safety Strategy Green Paper in October 2017 (pg. 30), which:

*aims to make Britain the safest place in the world to be online. It focusses on four main priorities:*

* *Setting out the responsibilities of companies to their users;*
* *Encouraging better technological solutions and their widespread use;*
* *Supporting children, parents and carers to improve online safety;*
* *Directly tackling a range of online harms.*

The paper highlights that more can be done to support children and young people, and their parents and carers, with an emphasis on adding internet safety to the school curriculum and improving digital literacy. Furthermore, the DfE aim to work with the Children’s Commissioner in order to develop a deeper understanding of the relationship between increased internet and social media use and mental health (HM Government, 2017).

Taking into account the above statistics and government initiatives regarding social media use, and the way in which these platforms are readily available through the use of smartphone apps, I felt it was important to first understand the impact that this social media phenomenon has on its users. With tabloids also reporting that social media has a negative impact on the mental health of adolescents (Walker, 2016), I wanted to establish what current research was telling us about social media use and mental health, and understand what this research says about the correlation, if any, between the rise in mental illness in children (WHO, 2017; YoungMinds, 2017) and their social media use.

Alongside this information, mainstream tabloid newspapers were consistently reporting headlines such as:

“Facebook and Twitter 'harm young people's mental health’”

(Levin, 2017)

“Ian Collins Says Social media Is Damaging Young People's Mental Health”

(LBC, 2017)

“Social media increasingly damaging young people's mental health”

(ITV news, 2016)

“Is social media causing childhood depression?”

(Wakefield, 2018)

This further ignited my curiosity into what research was actually telling us about social media use and mental wellbeing, and what could be done about it. Therefore, I conducted a literature search aiming to establish answers to the following questions:

1. What impact does the use of social media, such as Facebook and Instagram, have on mental health, in particular in adolescents?
2. If there is a link, what are the underlying factors contributing to the potential impact on mental health?
3. What can we do to support adolescents to manage the effects, if any, using social media has on their mental health?

### 2.5.1. What do we know about the impact of Social media use on mental health?

Mental Health difficulties are reportedly on the rise within the UK, particularly depression and self-harm among secondary school pupils (Lee, 2016). The Office of National Statistics (ONS) survey (2017) highlighted that 20% of all people aged 16-24 suffer from mental health difficulties; findings from the General Health Questionnaire indicated that this rise in mental health difficulties could be attributed to an increase in depression or anxiety. In response to the growing concern regarding mental health in young people the DoH and DfE (2017) devised the ‘Transforming Children and Young People’s Mental Health Provision: a Green Paper’, which highlighted the importance of fully exploring children and young people’s mental health, placing the mental health of children and young people at the forefront of contemporary societal issues.

The DoH and DfE (2017) recognise that that social media is an increasing feature in the lives of children and young people, whilst acknowledging the impact that using social media has on mental health is yet to be fully understood. Although evidence suggests that increased social media use is linked to poorer mental health it is not yet clear whether it is the increased social media use that raises the risk of poorer mental health, or whether an increase in poorer mental health drives an increase in social media use.

In the following sections I aim to critically review the current literature available regarding social media use and the impact this has on the mental wellbeing of both adults and adolescents.

#### 2.5.1.1. What does the research tell us about social media use and the mental health of adults?

Social media use is increasing among young adults in the United States, and its association with mental well-being remains unclear (Lin et al., 2016). In a survey consisting of 1,787 young adults (19-32) about social media use and depression, Lin et al. (2016) found that participants who spent more time on Facebook, in terms of minutes per day, and who made the most number of visits per week, displayed an increase in depressive symptoms. Although this study looked at how often and for how long people used social media, particularly Facebook, it did not look at how people were using social media e.g. to post online or to passively observe content, nor did it contain any qualitative data from participants regarding their online world.

Lup, Trub & Rosenthal (2015) used a theoretically grounded moderated mediation model to examine the association and frequency of Instagram use and depressive symptoms in 18-29 year olds. This was the first study of its kind to examine the association of Instagram use and depressive symptoms and links with attribution theory, which suggests that photos on Instagram trigger assumptions of real life, making people more vulnerable to judge themselves in relation to the assumed life evoking feelings of distress, particularly when following people who they do not know personally, i.e. strangers (Lup, Trub & Rosenthal, 2015). Results from this study indicated that the more strangers followed on Instagram the higher the correlation with depressive symptoms. Interestingly, unlike Lin et al. (2016) results from this study did not appear to find a significant correlation between the amount of time spent on Instagram following people participants knew and depressive symptoms. This leads me to question, is there a difference between how people use social media and their mental wellbeing? Is the amount of time users spend on Instagram irrelevant depending on how they are using the platform? For example, could individuals who spend much time thinking *about* social media (as opposed to time spent online in some capacity), be engaging in excessive self-comparison with others’ idealised portrayals of themselves, thus inciting depressive symptoms (Fox & Moreland, 2015; Sidani et al., 2016; Steers, Wickham & Acitelli 2014; Tandoc, Ferrucci, & Duffy, 2015).

Problematic Social Media use (PSMU) has been characterised by Shensa et al. (2017) as an excessive concern about social media, being driven by a strong motivation to use social media, and devoting so much time to social media use that it impairs other social activities, interpersonal relationships, studies/jobs, and/or psychological health and wellbeing. Using an online survey to assess the association between PSMU and depressive symptoms, Shensa et al. conducted research including 1,749 adults aged 19-32, interestingly, in support of the argument presented above by Lin et al. (2016), this study found that the frequency of social media use was significantly associated with depressive symptoms. However, contrary to Lin et al.’s research, Shensa et al. hypothesised that the reasons behind this correlation could be that people with PSMU neglect other constructive aspects of their lives. For example, engaging in high levels of online activities may lead to a decrease in face-to-face social interactions, physical activity, and could interrupt sleeping habits resulting in a higher incidence of depressive symptoms. (Choi et al., 2009: Moreno et al., 2013; Morrison & Gore, 2010; Pollet et al., 2011; Younes et al., 2016). It is also plausible that increased PSMU affects the way the individual internalises these online experiences, which may cause depression (Shensa et al., 2017).

In a thematic analysis study with 44 participants aged 19-52, Fox & Moreland (2015) identified five themes related to what they called the ‘dark side’ of Facebook. These included managing annoying/inappropriate content, feelings relating to being tied to Facebook, a perceived lack of control of their on line worlds and their privacy, social comparison leading to jealousy, and tension within relationships. Each of these themes could be seen to contribute to low mood and depressive symptoms. These findings highlighted that, although many people conceptualise them as separate worlds, online and offline experiences are inextricably linked and can impact negatively both in their offline worlds, such as in relationship jealousy, and in their online worlds, such as in comparisons with others. This made me wonder to what extent people realise how much their online world impacts on their offline world and vice versa.

Alternatively, Lin et al. (2016) argue that individuals already experiencing high levels of depressive symptoms may be more prone to PSMU. For example, individuals may skip face-to-face social interaction in favour of using social media because of its high accessibility and the possibility of socialising within a setting that they feel more able to control (Lin et al., 2016).

In relation to this, among a nationally (U.S.) representative cohort of individuals aged 19-32, Primack et al. (2017) found a linear association between increased use of social media and both self-reported depression and anxiety. As their data was associative, the directionality of this association between the increased social media use and self-reported depression/anxiety is unclear. It may be that individuals who suffer from these types of mental health difficulties have a tendency to use a wider variety of social media platforms. It may also be that using a wider variety of different social media platforms leads to depressive or anxious symptoms. Primack et al. (2017) use the example that depressed individuals may turn to multiple platforms for support, but that the increase in interaction does not fill that void, leading to more feelings of exclusion and/or disappointment. This may then lead people to keep up a cycle of reliance on social media platforms and negative outcomes for their mental health.

Contrary to the above research Tandoc et al., (2015) found that Facebook use on its own does not directly lead to depression. In fact what they found was that using Facebook can “even actually lessen depression” (pp. 144). In a wider context they expanded on this by explaining that Facebook is a platform of multiple uses that might lend itself to more positive outcomes for mental health. They found that although there was no direct link between Facebook use and depression, when they accounted for Facebook envy (using Facebook for surveillance evoking feelings of envy) there was a higher association between Facebook use and depression, concluding that Facebook use is linked to Facebook envy, and that Facebook envy is linked to depression. However, there were many limitations highlighted within this research in that: it did not account for other explanations of depression; envy takes on many forms and is influenced by a multitude of factors; the survey method relied heavily on self-reports; and it was not generalisable to the entire population of college students. This study further highlighted the important need to continue discourses around the impact social media use is having on the next generation and what lessons can be learnt for future generations who will only encounter an advanced network of social connectivity and social media platforms (Tandoc et al., 2015).

Also contradictory to research Jalenchick, Eickhoff & Moreno (2012) found no association between social media use and depression in their sample of “older adolescents”. Participants were aged 18-23 and asked to complete a survey of how much time they spent on social media sites and the Patient Health Questionnaire 9 (a validated screening instrument for depression in adolescents, Kroenke, Spitzer, & Williams, 2001). I felt that there were some limitations to this study. Firstly I questioned the term “older adolescents” age group of 18-23 year olds as previously discussed adolescence is typically thought of as 11-18 year olds. I also wondered if the depression scale was an appropriate tool for this age range as the PHQ 9 is a brief diagnostic tool used to diagnose clinical depression. The scale has a guide on how to treat patients depending on their overall score, and it is feasible that the restricted nature of the questions limited participants’ ability to recognise a wider variety of symptoms of depression.

Furthermore, the study reported that participants spent more than or equal to 30 minutes on social media sites per day, which made me question whether this was an appropriate conclusion that there was “no association between social media use and depression”. It may have been more accurate to report that results indicated no association between people aged between 18-23 who spend more than or equal to 30 minutes per day on social media and depressive symptoms. Finally, the study did not look at the type of social media use taking place, as in passive or active use, such as that of Lup, Trub & Rosenthal (2015). I feel their closing statement that “advising adolescent patients or parents on the risks of “Facebook depression” may be premature” (pp. 130) to be quite a bold statement to make based on their limited findings using a very specific tool, especially when research (Fox & Moreland, 2015; Lin et al., 2016; Pantic et al., 2012; Shensa et al., 2017) *has* found associations between depressive symptoms and social media use.

Research varies in the findings regarding the effects that social media use has on depressive symptoms in older adults. Pantic (2014) surmises that due to the differing measures within the studies used to evaluate depression it is unclear whether if studies using a wider range of methodologies would find the same correlation with social media. Regardless of the reason for such differences within the results of the studies, Pantic (2014) highlights a need for future research to clarify the possible relationship between social media and mental health difficulties. Among the available social media platforms today Facebook has more than one billion active users, Pantic argues that *“any indication that its use has a detrimental effect on mental health must be regarded as a potentially serious public health issue*” (Pantic et al., 2012, pg. 746), an argument that has been strengthened since the work of Shensa et al. (2017) and Primack et al. (2017).

Academics acknowledge that while more research is necessary to confirm and better understand the association between social media use and depression, it is reasonable to suggest that individuals displaying symptoms associated with depression and anxiety, who also use a high number of social media platforms, should work to decrease the amount of time they spend using social media, as well as the number of platforms they are using (Primack et al., 2017). I wondered how realistic this would be to achieve in today’s society, as many people use many platforms for many different reasons (Pantic, 2014). Particularly, from casual conversations I have had with teens about social media use, on Snapchat and Instagram, both forms of displaying pictures are used in completely different ways with a different purpose. As discussed in section 2.3 above, Snapchat is used to share pictures with followers twice (once initially with the follower given the option to replay the image) or for 24 hours on the “my story” option; whereas Instagram is used for sharing pictures that are available as long as the account is open/until the poster deletes them. I assume, from these conversations, and based on my own use of Instagram, that the pictures posted on Instagram are to show the more positive version of your life. However, the way in which these social media platforms are used, and the direct impact this has on adolescents (11-16) is widely understudied. In fact, there is a significant gap in the research with adolescents; with only a small number of studies looking at the impact social media use has on their mental health.

Within the next section I aim to critically reflect on the current research into social media use and mental health in adolescents. However, as will be recognisable throughout the following section there is a limited amount of research including young people aged 11-18, making it difficult to gain a clear picture of the experiences of the age range I am most interested in.

#### 2.5.1.2. What does the existing research tell us about social media use and the mental health of adolescents?

“Using social media web sites is among the most common activity of today’s children and adolescents” (O’Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011 pp.800). Due to their developing skills in emotional self-regulation and susceptibility to peer pressure, (WHO, 2019, O’Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011) this use of social media poses a potential risk as they navigate and experiment with the various social media platforms available to them. Research suggests that there are frequent online expressions of offline behaviours, such as bullying, clique forming, and sexual experimentation that have introduced additional problems such as: cyberbullying, sexting, ‘Facebook depression’, and privacy and influence of advertisements on buying (Lenhart, 2009; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). Most significant to this research was the research on ‘Facebook depression’, researchers defining this phenomenon as *“depression that develops when preteens and teens spend a great deal of time on social media sites, such as Facebook, and then begin to exhibit symptoms of depression”* (O’Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011, pg. 802).

In support of the research conducted by Lin et al. (2016) discussed in section 2.5.1.1., Pantic et al., (2012), in a Serbian study, found a similar association between the amount of time those in high schools spend on social media and the risk of depressive symptoms. This was a quantitative study including 160 high school students, using the Beck Depression Inventory II and a structured questionnaire. Although supporting the current argument for a correlation between social media use and depressive symptoms, this data lacks qualitative information from the participants to understand how they are using social media.

Further supporting the argument that the more time adolescents spend on social media the higher the risk to mental wellbeing is the research carried out by Sampasa-Kanyinga & Lewis (2015). In a representative sample of middle and high school children in Ottawa, Canada, they investigated the association between the amount of time pupils spent on social media and poor mental health. Findings from the research indicated that students with poor mental health were greater users of social media, with a suggestion that young people who reported using social media for more than two hours per day also reported mental health difficulties such as self-rated poor mental health, psychological distress, suicidal ideation, and an unmet need for mental health support (Sampasa-Kanyinga & Lewis, 2015).

Although the study does make some recommendations for supporting children with mental health difficulties associated with social media use, such as providing mental health training for parents and teachers, it does not seek to take into account the young people’s voice to find out what they think may help them. It offers hypotheses as to why an association between mental health difficulties and social media use may occur, such as adolescents not wanting the stigma of mental health attached to them and therefore not seeking out support, that adolescents are spending more than the recommended amount of time using social media (less than 2 hours), and a lack of accessible information. However, again the voice of the adolescents surveyed, appears to be absent. What this research also fails to do is take into account that young people may already be experiencing difficulties with their mental health, which may be driving them to spend more time on social media.

Radovic et al. (2017) used a convenience sampling strategy to recruit adolescents, whom they classified as aged 13-20, diagnosed with depression and receiving treatment. Semi-structured interviews were used to obtain information about social media use characteristics and positive and negative experiences. Some of the positive experiences the adolescents described included: being kept up to date with the day to day lives of friends and celebrities; being able to express emotions more freely; looking for humorous videos and YouTube clips; planning for future events with friends; finding acceptance regarding gender identity; and finding positive quotes and images helped with low mood. Some of the more negative experiences included: themselves or others sharing attention-seeking posts i.e. smoking, drug or alcohol abuse, inappropriate clothing, inappropriate comments from the opposite sex, with the purpose of being noticed or comparing themselves to others; difficulties abstaining from social media use, spending longer on social media than intended and craving more Twitter followers; using social media for social approval and social acceptance based on the number of ‘likes’ posts were given; comparing their lives with others based on likes, and the anonymous use of posts from others to cyberbully.

Radovic et al. (2017) also asked participants about the ways in which social media use may be related to depressive symptoms and found that, when compared to a general sample, the group with depression used social media more frequently and had larger friends networks. Also, more of these friends were strangers and not known to the adolescent. Adolescents with depression used social media for purposes common to other adolescents without depression (Radovic et al., 2017; Moreno & Kolb, 2012). These mainly included seeking social connection, entertainment, distraction, and as a creative outlet. They also reported experiencing negative consequences of using social media which were similar to other adolescents, for example cyberbullying and negative feelings arising when comparing themselves to others on social media.

Differences appeared to occur when some of these adolescents appeared to increase their social media use when feeling depressed. It was found that this was in an effort to improve their mood, release their emotions, gain support, and to feel as though they belong within an online community, alternatively it was to seek entertainment or to feel distracted. On occasion these adolescents would encounter the benefits; however on other occasions those who expressed that they felt depressed would encounter negative consequences, thus, further worsening their mood. These findings help to contextualise conflicting studies regarding the association of psychological distress and the frequency of social media use making the suggestion that while social media can negatively affect mood, those who are already experiencing a depressed mood may increase their social media use in an effort to improve their mood (Radovic et al., 2017).

Similarly, in a Dutch study of 1,201 young people aged 15-25 years, looking at the perceived appropriateness of expressing emotions on social media platforms, Waterloo et al. (2017), found that expressing positive emotions on social media was generally more acceptable than expressing negative ones, across all platforms. Although highlighting that portraying negative emotions is still acceptable, it is less acceptable than positive, congruent with the idea of presenting a “best version” of self. About 40% of adolescents reported to feel pressured to edit their profiles in order to portray themselves in a desired way, this included deleting and retaking photos, deleting comments that others made, and even deleting entire accounts (Madden et al., 2013).

Within Radovic et al.’s study they identified three problematic uses of social media: over sharing, stressed posting, and viewing triggering posts. These frequently expressed themes seemed to originate from an initial effort to improve their mood but would often result in a negative outcome. Although adolescents experienced negative outcomes when using social media, it appeared that they learned from these experiences as they underwent treatment and matured. They described positive changes to their behaviour towards using social media, which may provide a useful insight for practical guidance for other adolescents, parents and teachers (Radovic et al., 2017).

Limitations for the study conducted by Radovic et al. (2017) included the small sample size and lack of generalizability from findings. Particularly as this was a U.S. study of 13-20 year olds, it is not generalisable to the UK high school population (11-16) of which I have the most interest. However, it appears a reliable study that can be drawn upon in order to develop further research. For example, understanding helpful and unhelpful use is necessary so that people working with adolescents may provide proper guidance to young people. Adolescents should also be encouraged to reflect on their social media use by thinking about their actions when using platforms which have resulted in negative and positive outcomes in the past; this may encourage young people to approach their social media use in a more purposeful and mindful way. Implications for future research include assessment of content and contextual factors to improve our understanding of these associations and the ability to intervene (Radovic et al., 2017; Lin et al., 2016).

As well as the amount of time adolescents are spending on social media, there also appears to be links between *how* they are using social media specifically and the impact it has on mental wellbeing. Specifically looking at using Facebook Wint (2013), in a study conducted using Q methodology with 44 participants aged 13-16; found that young people reported negative attributes to using social media spanning three key themes. Firstly, a group of participants expressed worries about the dangers that could arise whilst using Facebook, with another group expressing that they do not want any trouble whilst using Facebook, with a third group expressing that they want to protect others whilst using Facebook. Interestingly, Wint also reported that a fourth group of participants described a more positive element to using Facebook in terms of being able to connect with their friends and expressed that they felt able to control their Facebook use. Radovic et al. (2017) also identified that adolescents’ experiences of using social media were not always negative and that in some cases improved mental wellbeing.

O’Reilly et al., in their 2018 thematic analysis study with 54 adolescents aged 11-18 years, found that participants overall had negative views on social media and its potential impact on their wellbeing. They identified that part of the difficulty was that participants’ knowledge of social media was limited as they had not studied it at school, therefore it could be argued that, through the absence of how to use social media within the curriculum, there is a limited understanding of the risks of social media use on mental wellbeing. Participants also argued that social media use: directly causes difficulties with mental health, such as low self-esteem, stress, depression, and suicidal ideation; exposes people to bullying and trolling, which also negatively impacts on mental health; and can be addictive.

Research conducted by The Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH, 2017) into the impact of specific social media platforms on mental health in adolescents, surveyed 1,479 UK 14-17 year olds and asked them about five popular social media platforms: Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter and YouTube. This research appears to look more specifically at individual platforms, rather than using social media as a more umbrella term for all platforms. Findings from this survey indicated that Instagram had the most negative impact on mental health in terms of body image; anxiety; depression; loneliness; sleep; bullying; and Fear of Missing out (FoMo), closely followed by Snapchat. YouTube had the most positive impact on mental health in terms of awareness; emotional support; self-expression; self-identity; and community building. This report used a scaling method in which the participants had to rate their personal experiences from -2 to +2. The outcome of the report highlighted that the impact of social media on the mental health of young people aged 14-17 can be both positive and negative and suggested some policy changes in order to help young people to manage those experiences effectively so as to reduce the negative impact.

In relation to the previous research discussed this survey provided a more accurate representation of young people’s voice in relation to social media and mental health also identifying positive elements that young people experience and made suggestions regarding how potential social media related risks could be minimalized. Further recommendations included carrying out additional research with young people in order to find out how they would like to be supported to manage any negative impact on their wellbeing.

At this point in the literature review it appears as though research into adolescent mental wellbeing and adult mental wellbeing are concluding similar findings, that there is a correlation between high levels of social media use and negative mental wellbeing, in particular depressive symptoms (Lin et al., 2016; Shensa et al., 2017, Pantic et al., 2012, and Fox and Moreland, 2015). However, the direction of the causality between social media use and the impact it has on mental wellbeing is not yet clear. Interestingly Wint and RSPH identified a positive element to Facebook use, which had not previously been discussed. From this I wanted to establish if there were any other themes emerging from the literature, these are discussed in the following sections.

##### 2.5.1.2.1. Social media and self-esteem

In 2006 Valkenburg, Peter & Schouten conducted a study investigating the consequences of friend media sites on adolescents (10-19 year olds) self-esteem and wellbeing. They found that the impact social media had on self-esteem was dependant on the way in which participants received feedback. Positive feedback on posts enhanced self-esteem and wellbeing, whereas negative feedback decreased self-esteem and wellbeing. Supporting this finding, McConnell et al. (2017) found that social media use can provide both a source of support and a source of victimisation leading to mental health difficulties.

In a follow up to Valkenburg (2006) including adolescents aged 10-15, Valkenburg, Koutamanis, & Vossen (2017) found that the correlation between social media use and social self-esteem was more complex than initially reported. This longitudinal study found that, over time, participants’ high social self-esteem increased their social media use, which resulted in small improvements in social self-esteem. They argue that this may be attributed to the idea that adolescents with high levels of self-esteem may be more inclined to communicate online and share positive information about themselves, therefore increasing the likelihood that they receive positive comments and feedback, further boosting their self-esteem. However, this study did not investigate the validity of the opposite effect, e.g. a decrease in social self-esteem due to tendencies of some social media users to compare themselves to other users that are perceived to be more successful, beautiful, engaging in more exciting activities than they are. Steers et al. (2014) also found evidence to support that people feel depressed after spending a large amount of time on Facebook as they compare themselves to others which makes them feel “badly”.

##### 2.5.1.2.2. Social media use and body image

More recently, research into the effects of social media use on adolescents has found a correlation between visual social media and body image concerns. Marengo et al. (2018) conducted a quantitative study with 523 participants aged 14 to investigate the relationship between highly visual social media (such as Instagram and Snapchat) and body image concerns and internalizing symptoms. They found that the more time adolescents spent on social media the more significantly higher they reported body image concerns and internalizing symptoms, suggesting that, adolescents who use highly visual social media platforms, may be at a higher risk of increased body image concerns, which in turn may lead to poorer mental wellbeing. In addition to what young people were looking at, Kelly et al. (2018) also found that the more time young people spent on social media the more likely they were to display dissatisfaction with their body image, and in turn experience depressive symptoms. They highlighted that this information was crucial in developing regulations about how long young people should spend on social media.

Burnette et al. (2017), in a qualitative thematic analysis study with 38 adolescent girls (12-14 years old) found that girls expressed concern regarding social media use and the impact that it has on their appearance, in particular identifying seeing celebrities’ pictures as having the most detrimental impact on their body image. Interestingly, although this study highlighted the potential for social media use to impact on girls’ perception of their body image a number of protective factors were identified, including: social media literacy taught in school, acceptance of self and confidence taught in school, respecting your body and appreciating who you are no matter what, not following people who make you feel bad, and parental regulations and restrictions.

##### 2.5.1.2.3 Social media use and addiction

Research suggests that social media addiction is becoming problematic for adolescents. Kuss & Griffiths (2017) proposed that the perceived need to be online may result in compulsive use of social networking sites, which in extreme cases may result in symptoms traditionally associated with substance based addition. Kuss & Griffiths (2017) went on to summarise ten key lessons from previous empirical research into social media use and addition. Most relevant to this research is the notion that individuals can become addicted to social networking sites, not because of the technology as previous research has argued, but because of the connection with others and the good feelings that ‘likes’ and positive comments of appreciation on posts can produce. They further suggest that Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) may lead to negative consequences of social media use, and that those who have higher FOMO are at a bigger risk of mental health difficulties (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). In terms of changes to social media use that users can make in order to reduce the risk of addiction, Kuss & Griffiths suggested assessing users for levels of FOMO and smartphone addiction. Further recommendations centred on the need for more research into this area.

More recently, Tunc-Aksan & Akbay (2019) carried out a study of 296 high school students in Turkey using a descriptive survey method. They looked at whether smartphone addiction, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), and perceived academic competence predicted social media addiction in high school students. They firstly concluded that social media addiction among adolescents caused smartphone addiction, with FOMO being the secondary variable predicting social media addiction. Interestingly they found that the third variable predicting social media prediction was students’ perception of academic competence, with those who felt more academically competent indicating less risk of developing social media addiction. However, this study is not yet generalisable to the UK adolescent population due to the research being undertaken in Turkey. I also wondered whether stating that the variables ‘caused’ social media addiction was too decisive, rather it could be said that smartphone addiction, FOMO, and perceived academic competency could predict social media addiction and should be considered when supporting young people presenting with social media related difficulties.

Research into social media addiction in undergraduate students in the US also argues that neurologically, Facebook users in particular, experience a constant battle between rational and irrational systems in the brain, with social self-regulation being negatively associated with compulsive social media use (Osatuyi & Turel, 2018). Osatuyi & Turel (2018) suggested that individuals who felt more able to regulate their behaviour when under social pressure were less likely to experience addictive symptoms, proposing interventions which focus on develop efficacy to promote self-regulation when under social pressure as being key to reducing the risk of social media addiction.

Similarly, in a study of 283 Italian adolescents looking at the interplay between Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in promoting addictive Facebook use found that students displaying higher level of ADHD symptoms were more likely to display high levels of addictive Facebook use, again, highlighting that self-regulation skills may be key to lowering the risk of social media addiction (Settanni et al., 2018).

Apaolaza et al. (2019), in a study of university students looking at the impact Mindfulness has on compulsive social media use, found that compulsive social media use increased the stress levels of social media users due to higher levels of social anxiety and lower self-esteem. However, they also found that those students reporting higher levels of Mindfulness practice indicated higher levels of self-esteem and a decrease in social anxiety and compulsive social media use, indicating that Mindfulness practice decreases the likelihood of developing problematic social media use. This suggests that interventions aimed at increasing Mindfulness practice are likely to enhance self-esteem and reduce social anxiety, therefore reducing compulsive social media use. Although, outside of the age range I am most keen to study, this research provides an insight into what can be done to support those struggling with social media related difficulties.

These findings on social media addiction suggest that adolescents should be educated in social media literacy, smartphone use, and self-regulation efficacy. Also, research suggests that a Mindfulness based intervention may reduce compulsive social media use. However, further research needs to take place with adolescents within the UK to investigate social media addiction, as this could potentially be causing additional negative effects on adolescent wellbeing.

##### 2.5.1.2.4 Social media use and relationships

Research into the effects of social media use has often argued that using social media to connect with others, negatively affects relationships, particularly the idea that social media isolates users from ‘real-life’ contact and prevents face to face social interactions (Larose et al., 2014, Dunbar, 2018). However, there is research that argues that the impact of social media on relationships can also be positive, with findings that suggest connection with others can diminish bad moods and reduce the risk of depressive symptoms (Larose et al., 2014; Lombardi et al., 2019).

Weinstein (2018) in a survey of 568 adolescents, followed up with 26 in depth interviews in the US, and found that there were four functional dimensions of social media use. This study highlighted that relational interactions were the most positive social media experience affecting their wellbeing, with participants describing their social media interactions as supporting their peer relationships. Exploration within the interview stage of the study, explored this further and established that teens attributed *both* positive and negative emotions to the way in which social media influences their social relationships, and feelings of connectedness with others. Positively, social media allows for connection with family and friends that may not live nearby, constant direct communication with their friends, and easy ‘less formal’ conversation. Negatively, social media can cause miscommunication based conflict, negative feelings of disconnect if their friends are at events they have not been invited to, and difficulties keeping up with communication with a fear of appearing rude if they do not reply when they receive messages through social media platforms.

Weinstein (2018) also found that self-expression amongst peers presented adolescents with both positive and negative emotions. Positively, in their ability to reminisce and reflect on how much they have changed since joining the app, and negatively as it causes worry about how others judge their self-expression, a lack of acceptance, and a worry about the number of likes on their posts. Due to these worries the creation of fake Instagram accounts is on the rise in adolescents (McGregor & Li, 2019). Fake Instagram accounts or ‘Finsta’s’ are a new way for teens to connect with their ‘real friends’ in a space where they feel comfortable to express their ‘true selves’. In order to create these ‘Finsta’ accounts teens set up two accounts their ‘public’ account in which anyone can follow them, and view and comment on their posted content, and a ‘Finsta’ account in which they accept only the people who are closest to them to view and comment on their shared content. These Finsta accounts play a vital role in creating positive feelings of connection in their ability to share content and create a community of shared values and experiences, which is not offered through their public Instagram accounts (Weinstein, 2018; McGregor & Li, 2019).

Nesi et al. (2018) acknowledged that the way in which adolescents in today’s society are forming relationships is transforming due to social media platforms. With interpersonal behaviours such as excessive reassurance seeking of self-worth and negative feedback seeking of self-criticism amplified by social media use and the increasing frequency and immediacy of these interactions, Nesi et al. sought to create a model of how social media is reshaping traditional peer relationships. Within the model they identify seven features of social media interactions that fundamentally differ from adolescents’ peer experiences. Nesi et al. argue that where much of the research adopts a mirroring framework, in that relationship dynamics on social media replicate offline experiences, the ‘Transformational Framework’ builds on the recognition that social media directly impacts on adolescents’ peer relationships. This is useful in helping to understand the way in which adolescents’ relationships with their peers are changing due to social media; however it does not provide an understanding of support systems for these new developments.

##### 2.5.1.2.5 Moderating social media use

Within the mainstream media there have been calls for social media platforms to do more to minimise the risks that its use has on mental health. With a rise in cases of significant harm and suicide being linked to social media use the spotlight has been placed on the platforms to change the way in which they moderate content. With headlines such as:

“Social media urged to take 'moment to reflect' after girl's death” (Adams, 2019)

“Six British teens' suicides linked to social media” (IOL, 2019)

“At last, a law to protect our children online: Minister's radical crackdown on social media giants after spate of suicides and inaction on self-harm posts” (Ellicott, 2019)

It is evident that moderating social media content is proposed as key to reducing the risk to adolescent mental health; however there has been minimal research into the effects of social media platforms moderation of content on mental health. When looking at the guidelines of social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat, they are all similar, which is perhaps unsurprising given that they encounter many of the same problems. The guidelines for each platform refer to sexual content ranging from a hint of nudity to explicit pornography, graphic content such as violence, and harassment such as abuse, trolling and direct threats. The language within the guidelines refers to platforms not tolerating this type of content and warning users that they may face their accounts being closed if they are reported for this type of content (Gillespie, 2018; Facebook, 2019; Instagram, 2019; Snapchat, 2019).

However, Gillespie (2018) argues that as “moderation happens at a data scale” (pg. 147) it relies on social media platform managers to decide what content is inappropriate and should be removed. Social media platform managers need to be aware of and attentive to users and therefore must also police content. However, this content is only available to be reviewed by moderators after social media users report it as inappropriate, which could be too late for adolescents who are looking at content that may cause them psychological harm. Looking at the above headlines, it appears there is a call for platforms to moderate content before it is available to view, however this feels like an impossible task.

In a study looking at the effectiveness of internet filtering tools designed to protect adolescents from online risks, Przybylski & Nash (2017) interviewed 1030 adolescents and their caregivers. Interestingly, they found that the caregivers’ use of internet filtering technology within the home did not reduce adolescents’ chances of encountering adverse online content. Although this study only looked at internet filters within the home and not those that are available through mobile devices, it highlights the need for teens to be educated in safe social media use.

When carrying out a brief search for inappropriate content on Instagram and Facebook, it was clear that the response to filtering content amongst platforms is inconsistent. To give an example, when entering the search term ‘self-harm’ into Instagram, 27 accounts relating to self-harm, some displaying graphic images, were available for public viewing with no links to external support systems. However, when entering the same search term in Facebook the top response is the question “can we help?” with a link to three suggestions “Talk to a friend”, “contact a helpline” and “Find ways to support yourself”. The following hits on the original search are links to self-harm support groups within the Facebook community. It is clear that further work needs to be done to protect adolescents from potential risks associated with viewing harmful content.

#### 2.5.1.3 Summary

It is becoming clear from the literature review that social media is a phenomenon that is now a way of life for adolescents. The way in which it affects their overall development, but particularly their mental health and wellbeing, remains unclear with research beginning to acknowledge that there are some potential benefits as well as risks to social media use. What also appear to be clear are the gaps in the research: firstly, in that adolescents (aged 11-16) are understudied; and secondly what strategies may potentially support young people to manage the demands of this new way of social interaction. In particular, there appears to be a lack of evidence that guides schools and associated professionals, i.e. Educational Psychologists, in how to support young people to manage the daily risks and demands that social media places on their ‘mental load’. Although Apaolaza et al. (2019), RSPH (2017), Gillespie (2018) and Pryzbylski & Nash (2017) have all identified starting points in terms of Mindfulness, education, and moderation of social media platforms, currently it appears that this research is in its infancy and requires further exploration.

I look to further explore the implications for future research and how I can develop some of the ideas for my own research in the following sections.

## 2.6. Statement of the problem

Digital technology is becoming increasingly integral to adolescents’ lives and is unlikely to go away, so a mere ‘simple’ solution of social media celibacy may not help them to be healthier and happier (Boyd, 2014). As highlighted by the RSPH (2017) and Burnette (2017) there are a variety of ways in which we can support adolescents to manage negative experiences resulting from using social media. For example, we need to find ways to utilise social media in a more positive way that promotes positive mental wellbeing, while better equipping young people to manage the possible risks to their mental wellbeing (O’Reilly et al., 2018). Furthermore, professionals need to develop their skills in providing appropriate support to young people whose social media use negatively affects their wellbeing.

Throughout this review, the attention has been drawn to the existing literature and varying discourses surrounding the impact that using social media has on adolescents’ mental wellbeing. To summarise, the issues discussed within the chapter relate to the following issues:

* A correlation between social media use and depressive symptoms and mental health difficulties in adults.
* A correlation between social media use and mental wellbeing in adolescents’, including increased risk of depressive symptoms, low self-esteem, and body image and appearance issues.
* Potential risks of adolescents developing addictive social media behaviour patterns.
* A mixed view of the effects that social media can have on peer relationships, with the acknowledgement that there can be both positive and negative implications for relationships. There is also a discourse being presented that social media is transforming the way in which adolescents form relationships with their peers.
* Difficulties and inconsistencies moderating social media content, with potential harmful content easy to view.
* Uncertainty about what can be done about these issues, with a ‘simple’ answer of not using social media feeling inadequate.
* Limited qualitative research into the impact of social media on adolescent wellbeing.
* A somewhat lack of consideration that it may not be how much, but rather *how* social media is used that is associated with mental health and wellbeing difficulties.
* A somewhat significant gap in the existing literature that explores young people’s views on their experiences of social media use, such as how they use social media platforms, how much time they spend on them, and whether these experiences lend themselves to positive or negative impacts on mental wellbeing.
* Significant gaps in exploring young people’s views on how their social media experiences could be improved.
* A need for clarity on how professionals, parents, individuals and the social media platforms themselves can support young people to manage social media usage, considering its ever evolving and ever present nature within young people’s culture.

## 2.7. The aims and purpose of the study

The current study aims to use Q methodology to explore the views of adolescents aged 13-16 regarding their experiences of using social media use, whether they think it impacts on their mental wellbeing, how they perceive this impact, be it negative or positive, and what they think can be done to improve their experiences when using social media. Furthermore, the research aims to seek young people’s views on what they think can be done to support those whose social media use is negatively affecting their wellbeing at an individual, parent, professional, and social media platform level.

## 2.8. Research questions

The following research questions were formulated in light of the existing literature, and taking into account the purpose and desired aims of the study:

* RQ1) What do young people think about the impact that using social media has on their wellbeing?
* RQ2) What do young people think would, or does, improve their experiences of using social media?

# Chapter 3: Methodology

## 3.1. Introduction

This chapter begins by providing a brief overview of my philosophical position as an individual and professional (Trainee Educational Psychologist). Following this I aim to highlight the ontological and epistemological assumptions underpinning the research leading to the justification for using Q methodology as the most appropriate research tool for my chosen topic. As part of the rationale for Q methodology I will provide a brief historical background as to the origins of Q as well as outlining the stages followed when conducting a piece of Q methodology research. Following this the procedures chapter will outline the specific way in which the structure of Q methodology was followed when conducting this piece of research. I will explain the rationale for using Q and why it was deemed the most appropriate methodology for answering the research questions posed in chapter 2, including why a range of methodologies were considered and ultimately rejected.

## 3.2. Philosophical position

In the following chapter sections I aim to outline my research position from a personal and professional (Trainee Educational Psychologist) perspective, providing context to the ontological, epistemological and methodological approach taken within the research. It is hoped that this will provide an understanding of the decisions made within the research.

### 3.2.1. Individual

The justification for choosing to undertake research in this area derived from my own experiences of using social media platforms, such as Instagram, Facebook and Snapchat to connect with friends and family, post images of myself and my friends and family, and passively –scroll through platforms without commenting – read others’ posts within these platforms. I began to notice that the more time I spent on social media looking at others’ images and portrayals of their lives, the less satisfied with aspects of my own life I was becoming, namely my perception of my body image, how healthy/strong I was, and how much fun I was having in comparison to others. I noted that my social media use was becoming habitual, with the more time I spent on social media the more self-critical I was becoming. Alongside this, I began to notice the widespread mainstream media attention that social media was getting, with phrases such as “Facebook and Twitter 'harm young people's mental health” (Levin, 2017) and “Instagram worst social media app for young people's mental health” (Fox, 2017) hitting the headlines of the news. I began to wonder what it was about social media platforms that were having such a negative impact on seemingly not only my well-being, but the well-being of those who have been raised in an era of ever advancing technology and communication systems. As I recognised the impact it was beginning to have on my well-being I implemented strategies such as spending less time on social media, only looking at posts that made me feel good, and making sure that I was less passive in my usage, i.e. reducing the amount of time I spent scrolling through social media platforms without actively posting myself. This made me further wonder what the young people who were negatively affected by social media usage were able to implement for themselves, and what support systems were available to those who were suffering as a result of their social media use. This drove me to not only want to research further into this area, but to gain an understanding of adolescents’ perspectives on social media, capturing their voice within the research.

### 3.2.2. Professional

Whilst working and studying as a trainee educational psychologist, I consistently adopt a humanistic and solution focussed consultative approach towards the work I undertake. Consultation aims to aid the functioning of the complex system and interrelated systems in which EP’s work, including the school, family, and external agencies and the way in which these systems interact and relate to and with each other (Wagner, 2000). For me, the purpose of a consultation is to develop a shared understanding of the problem being presented, develop shared hypotheses about what may be causing the problem, and then bring about change in all systems around the child or young person experiencing difficulties in order to make a difference to their experiences. It’s the ‘making a difference’ to the child or young person’s life that is vital for me as a practitioner, which is why I adopt a solution focussed approach to consultation. My practice typically centres on the Monsen Problem Solving Framework (Kelly, 2006), which aims to empower consultees to reach a potential solution/s to the problem. Through a consultative approach this enables a trial of the solution/s to take place and further consultation to evaluate and discuss next steps.

Alongside my solution focussed consultative approach, I also pride myself on adopting a Rogerian perspective of unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1967) when working with the families, children and young people, and all other professionals involved with the case. One of my strengths as a practitioner, throughout the consultation process, is eliciting the voice of the children and young people that I work with to ensure that they feel part of the process and that they feel as though their voice has been heard and valued. Understanding the experiences that children have in their life is important, in particular when they are exposed to adverse situations. Insights into their understanding of experiences give important information and potential ideas on how to support them (Ellingson et al., 2014).

It is this value of including children and young people in exploring problems alongside my problem solving mind-set that led me to the research questions (pg. 33) as part of this study. I firstly wanted to explore the problem of social media use with young people ensuring their voice was heard. Secondly, I did not want to merely add to the existing literature surrounding the impact that social media has on adolescent mental health. I wanted to explore potential solutions to the ‘problem’ and create something tangible from the research.

### 3.2.3. Ontology and Epistemology

In order to fully explore the philosophical underpinnings of this research it is important to gain an understanding of the terms “Ontology” and “Epistemology”. Thomas (2017, pp123) defines ontology as being “about *what* you are looking at – the kind of events that exist in the social world” and epistemology as being about “*how* you look and find out about these”. In essence ontology is looking at what there is or exists in the social world i.e. the *thing,* and epistemology is the study of our knowledge of the world, i.e. how do we come to understand the *thing* and what it represents (Thomas, 2017; Williams, 2017). In the following subsections I hope to make clear the philosophical perspective I hold which underpins the research and the decisions I took when forming this philosophical position.

### 3.2.3.1. Realism

Within ontology there are three main schools of thought in relation to what we know as scientists: Realists, Idealists and Relativists. When approaching research from a realist perspective, there is an understanding that there is an existence of some kind of reality, a ‘truth’ out there to be sought through research (Blaikie, 2009). In the most basic of terms a realistic view of the world would assume that phenomena are measurable, quantifiable and understood in the same way by all (Guyon et al., 2018). Realist research lends itself well to quantitative research with predictive methodologies i.e. large scale surveys, with an aim of studying the phenomena that wants to be understood (Scott, 2014). When I decided to undertake research into social media I initially thought that I would be adopting a realist perspective, as, in my view, social media is a very real and recent phenomena that is affecting the mental health of adolescents. However, after conducting the literature review, and from a personal perspective a quantitative approach did not seem to fit with the research questions. Yes, I wanted to study the phenomenon that is social media, but I also wanted to understand the causal relationship between its usage and adolescent mental health, and further, through discourse, what can be done to minimise any negative impact it is having on adolescent mental health. Therefore, a realist perspective did not seem to fit with the outcomes I wanted to achieve within the research.

### 3.2.3.2. Social Constructionism

On further exploration of epistemology, I was keen to explore the philosophical position that would fit with my desire to understand the causal relationships between social media and negative mental health outcomes. I began to explore Social Constructionism as a research position.

According to Burr (2015) social constructionists recognise that all ways of understanding the world and our experiences within it are historically and culturally relative, they are seen as products of culture and history and are dependent upon the particular social and economic arrangements prevailing in that culture at that time. From a social constructionist perspective our ways of understanding phenomena are not necessarily better, nor are they nearer the truth, as the ‘truth’ is constructed through personal and social experiences. From a social constructionist perspective people construct their knowledge of the world between them through discourse. In the case of this research the “knowledge” that social media use causes mental health difficulties, i.e. depression, and that the extended use of social media causes significant harm to adolescents, has been constructed through the use of predominantly large scale surveys correlated with clinical self-reported depression scales.

However, in its extreme form, social constructionists would argue that everything is a social construction and there is nothing else that we know of the world (Elder-Vass, 2012). When considering social constructionism for this particular research I was uncertain about the extent of the fit with what I was hoping to achieve. Although, I do believe, as social constructionists do, that knowledge is constructed through experience and how we interact with the world, I also believe that ultimately there are ‘truths’ that may emerge and change the perception of the phenomena that is being studied.

### 3.2.3.3. From Realism and Social Constructionism to Critical Realism

It was further exploration into research philosophy that led me to Critical Realism. Critical Realism assumes transcendental realist ontology. Similarly, to social constructionism, critical realism uses causal language to describe the world, assuming that there is a real world ‘out there’ but that equally there is no way to prove or disprove this assumption. Like social constructionists, critical realists accept that society is socially constructed however argue that it is not entirely so, in that sometimes the ‘real’ world breaks through and challenges the complex stories that we create in order to understand and explain the phenomena being researched (Easton, 2010; Fletcher, 2017; Sayer, 2000).

Critical realism acknowledges that social phenomena are intrinsically meaningful, and hence that meaning is not only externally descriptive of them but constitutive of them (though of course there are usually material constituents too). Meaning has to be understood, it cannot be measured or counted, and hence there is always an interpretive or hermeneutic element in social science (Sayer, 2000, pg. 17).

According to Sayer (2000) critical realism is an intensive approach to research which allows for both explorations of quantitative approaches to what is being studied, whilst acknowledging their qualitative nature. Grounded in the research of Bhaskar (2008), critical realism bridges the gap between realism i.e. ‘truth’ and constructionism, in other words, ‘truth’ constructed by experience. According to Bhaskar one cannot exist without the other - the knowledge of science cannot exist without the science and vice versa. Furthermore, adequate philosophy of science, or the research topic, must be capable of sustaining both the ‘truth’ and the way in which knowledge of the ‘truth’ is generated. Critical realism appears to bridge the gap between pure quantitative relations between variables which do not necessarily address the causal relations (Sayer, 2000).

It was this perspective of research and ‘truth’ that appealed to me the most and led me to a mixed-methods approach to research, more specifically Q methodology.

### 3.2.4. Why Q?

Q methodology, deemed an “alternative” methodology developed by Stephenson, aims to challenge historically dominant paradigms of psychological enquiry in a critical manner, predominantly focussing on a behaviourist approach and one of cognitivism (Stenner, 2008; Watts & Stenner, 2005). Q’s convergence of quantitative data collection with the qualitative element of interpreting the data seemed the most appropriate fit for a critical realist philosophical approach to conducting research. Critical realism allows for establishing data patterns which are then used to guide research into the observable social structures (Zachariadis, Scott & Barrett, 2013). Q methodology appeared at this stage the best fit for enabling a better understanding of social media use and the impact that this is having on adolescent mental health.

Q-Methodology was developed as a systematic view of subjectivity in that it was designed to explore the subjective dimension of any issue towards which different points of view can be expressed. Methodologically speaking subjectivity is the centre of concern in two related ways that correspond with the two main aspects of Q-Methodology 1) the collection of data in the form of Q-Sorts, and 2) the subsequent by-person correlation and factor analysis of those sorts (Stenner, Watts & Worrell, 2008). The statements that are sorted within Q are matters of opinion, generated from the participants themselves and the fact that they are ranked from their own point of view is also central to the subjectivity of Q (Brown, 1993).

When ruminating over the approach of Q methodology, in comparison to other methodologies, and its suitability to meet my research intentions (chapter 2) my initial thoughts were that the chosen methodology would need to:

* Answer the research questions posed in chapter 2.
* Fit with the critical realist philosophy that I felt best suited my beliefs about research and establishing ‘truths’.
* Address my own ethical views of working with young people.
* Provide a tool for documenting shared viewpoints in a way that ensured each individual viewpoint was equally heard and integral to the data analysis.
* Reduce any potential power dynamics between the researcher and the participants.
* Allow participants voices to be dominant throughout the research, without any researcher bias imposing on their viewpoint.
* Be exploratory in nature.
* Accommodate a larger sample of participants than would traditionally be found in a qualitative approach such as narrative, but retain the personal elements and individuality of the participants included.

## 3.3. Introducing Q Methodology

Q-Methodology is a research technique that enables the subjective viewpoints of an individual, or group of individuals to be explored. It finds the level of agreement, and consequently disagreement, within a research area. It is ideally designed for researching views as it acknowledges that they are subjective (Willard, 2016). Q-Methodology aims to maximise the expression of subjectivity and to deal with an unusual situation of a form of data analysis that treats participants as variables rather than cases (to be discussed further within this chapter). Q methodology is a *gestalt* procedure meaning it can never separate its subject matter into a series of constituent themes; however what it can do is look for the primary ways in which these themes are related to participant groups (Watts & Stenner, 2005). The result of a Q study is thus the holistic identification of a limited range of distinctive viewpoints relating to the subject matter (Stenner, Watts & Worrell, 2008).

Q methodology sets out to do that which R does not. In R methodology, typically large scale surveys, participants are subjects and questions are variables, with the overall intention to look at patterns in responses across the variables for each person. In Q research, subjects and variables are inverted where the subjects of the Q study are the Q-set items and the variables are the Q sorts that the participants generate within the sorting process, Q researchers’ main intention being to find commonality between Q sorts indicating a shared belief amongst participants (Webler, Danielson & Tuler, 2009).

Thus, it is argued that the unique approach of Q methodology can elicit subjective viewpoints through the use of a structured quantitative approach. It is this approach that makes Q unique as it brings together qualitative and quantitative research, as such Q is often referred to as a “qualiquantological” method (Stenner & Stainton Rogers, 2004). This unique approach bridges the divide between qualitative and quantitative methods, whilst bringing together the depth of both, to elicit shared viewpoints amongst a group of participants.

### 3.3.2. Aims of Q research

The aim of a Q methodology study is to gain access to a range of viewpoints gathered by the participants involved in the study, and not to make claims about the frequency of their occurrence amongst the general population (Willig & Stainton Rogers, 2008), meaning that data from Q studies cannot be regarded as generalisable to the general population. It is not my intention to gather generalisable data. As outlined in the background, large scale surveys with associated generalisable findings only identify the ‘problem’ rather than providing an insight into the underlying cause of the problem. In this study I hope to provide an opportunity for a sample of young people to express their ‘voice’ surrounding the topic of social media and mental health, aiming to understand what they think would help them to have more positive experiences of social media use.

In contrast to more traditional deductive approaches to research, which set out to use data to confirm a hypothesis, Q-methodology offers an abductive approach to research. With an abductive approach to research, the data is used to create possible hypotheses; the most likely theory is then selected to explain the data (Wint, 2013). However, in addition, Watts & Stenner (2012) look at Q methodology as offering both inductive and deductive approaches to analysis, an inductive approach where the demands of the data is followed and the researcher lets the data take the lead, and a deductive approach where the researcher has a preconceived reason for taking the lead on the data and seeks out a resolution in preference to all others.

## 3.4. Overview of a Q Methodology Study

Here I will give a brief overview of the seven stage process used when conducting a Q Methodological study, setting the scene for the procedures chapter which follows.

### 3.4.1. Stage 1: Identify the concourse

In Q, concourse refers to the flow of communication within the ordinary conversation, commentary and discourse surrounding any topic. The concourse is a technical concept used in Q methodology for the collection of all the possible statements the respondents can make about the subject being discussed. The concourse therefore contains all of the relevant aspects of all of the discourses (van Exel & de Graaf, 2005). The list of items generated through the concourse can include existing literature, television programmes, and websites, information gained from social media, mainstream media outlets, and focus groups. A concourse should combine: “virtually all manifestations of human life, as expressed in the lingua franca of shared culture” (Brown, 1993, p.94). As such it does not have to rely on discourse alone and can contain pictures, music and dance, video, and other non-discursive materials.

The concourse is, or what it becomes, is going to be defined by the research question to be answered (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Therefore, the research question plays an integral part in any Q methodological study as it dictates the nature and structure of the Q set to be generated and also acts as a ‘condition of instruction’ for the participants, guiding the actual sorting process (Watts & Stenner, 2005). The research question should be straightforward and clearly stated and the Q set should enable the participants to respond to the question in an effective fashion. Following the research question the Q set must always demonstrate a broad representation of the topic being discussed.

### 3.4.2. Stage 2: Create a sample

The Q-sample or Q-set is derived from the information gathered through filtering and sampling the concourse; these are the potential statements that will endeavour to answer the research question. This typically comprises a series of statements written on cards, numbered for researcher reference, with the aim of the statements providing a scaled down version of the concourse without losing the comprehensiveness in content or representation of the topic (Van Exel and de Graaf, 2005). There are many contexts in which a Q set can be presented to participants, for example Ellingson, Thorson & Storkson (2014) carried out a study looking at young children’s early experiences of divorce using a Q set of visual images. It is more common however in a qualitative and psychological context, for a Q set to be comprised of statements, each making a different claim about the appropriate subject matter (Watts & Stenner, 2005).

The size of the final Q set will be dictated by the subject matter itself. Generally speaking a Q set of 40-80 statements is considered satisfactory. Any less than this and issues of adequate coverage may be a problem. Equally any more than this and the sorting may become unnecessarily cumbersome. As long as the items within the set are broadly representative of the viewpoints of the participants, the engagement of the participants will provide an overview of relevant viewpoints on the subject (Watts & Stenner 2005). The development of the statements making up the Q set can be considered a craft, it is time consuming and the most important aspect of a Q methodology study and therefore imperative that it is fit for purpose. However, it is argued that a Q set “can never really be complete (as there is always “something else” that might be potentially said)” (Watts & Stenner, 2005, p.75), however providing that it “contains a representative condensation of information” (Watts & Stenner, 2005, p.75) a Q set can still be considered robust.

### 3.4.3. Stage 3: Selection of Participants (p-set)

Participants in Q studies are thought of as strategic ‘sites’ that can provide subjective viewpoints, typically these viewpoints are independent of other participants and are limited to the items listed within the Q set (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Therefore, Q methodology works best when people are knowledgeable about the issue and have well-formed opinions. The aim from the p-set is to capture a range of opinions present in a concourse (Webler, Danielson & Tuler, 2009). Due to the importance of the participants within the p-set having knowledge about the issue is not only the determining factor in recruitments, participants need also to have a defined viewpoint to express (Watts & Stenner, 2012), meaning that a good p-set needs to be carefully considered and thought out.

Q studies generally do not need a large number of participants; *“all that is required are enough subjects to establish the existence of a factor for purposes of comparing one factor with another”* (Brown, 1980, pg. 192). Deciding on a final number of participants can be a difficult process as some literature ascribes complicated formulae to the process. Webler, Danielson & Tuler (2009) suggest that the ideal number of participants is a ‘trade-off’ between two rules of thumb. The first being, that it would be wise to have more observations (Q statements) than variables (participants) with a ratio of 1:3 (three statements for every one participant). With the second being, that the numbers of participants need to be enough to adequately summarize the viewpoint identified in the concourse (between two and five viewpoints with more than three participants in each viewpoint). Kline (1994) suggests a minimum ratio of two Q-set items to every participant, meaning in a study containing 60 Q set items a maximum number of 30 participants could be used. Taking this into account a good Q study can take place as long as the p-set consists of fewer participants than the number of items within a Q set (Watts and Stenner, 2012).

### 3.4.4. Stage 4: Collecting data through Q sorting

Once the Q-set and participant numbers have been finalised the participants then ‘sort’ the items within the Q-set into a pre-determined configuration (the Q-Sort) that reflects a personal degree of agreement with the items. The Q set is given to the participants in the form of a pack of randomly numbered cards, each card including one of the statements from the Q-set. The participant is then asked to rank the statement according to the condition of instruction (a person’s point of view regarding the issue) into the pre-determined configuration known as the distribution grid (Brown, 1980). This distribution will either be through a forced choice, in that the researcher has identified how many statements participants can place in each ranking, or it can be a free distribution where participants can freely place as many statements as they like under each ranking (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Whichever distribution is chosen participants are usually asked to rank the statements from ‘most’ to ‘most’, for example ‘most disagree’ to ‘most agree’ (Van Exel & de Graaf, 2005).

Once participants have sorted the items in the Q-set and are confident that it represents their viewpoint on the topic it is recommended that they are asked to complete a post-sort interview in order to elaborate on their most salient statements, exploring participants’ wider understanding of the issue, which is helpful for the interpretation of factors later on (Van Exel & de Graaf, 2005; Watts & Stenner, 2012).

### 3.4.5. Stage 5: Entering the data

There are a number of ways of entering Q-sort data ready for Factor Extraction and full analysis. Schmolck (2014) provides free software for windows and mac (PQMethod) which allows researchers to input data from each individual Q sort ready for extraction and analysis. Stricklin & Almeida (2010) also offers a similar product (PCQ for Windows) for a fee. SPSS, and other software packages that can be used to run statistical analyses can also be used, however it is not typically ideal. SPSS data spreadsheets are traditionally set up to run R methodological (factor) analyses, therefore the software would need adjusting in order to account for the nature of Q factor analysis, which, when PQMethod and PCQ for Windows does this automatically, is not logical for analysing Q-sort data (Watts & Stenner, 2012).

### 3.4.6. Stage 6: Analysing the data

The Q-Sorts of a number of participants are then analysed by-person to produce a smaller set of factors which identifies a highly inter-correlated cluster of Q-Sorts, highlighting Q-Sorts within the group that have been sorted in a similar way. Correlations between Q-Sorts *“typically express a shared and coherent point of view on the topic addressed by the item set”* (Stenner, Watts & Worrell, 2008, pg. 216; van Exel & de Graaf, 2005).

In order to achieve the coherent viewpoint shared by the participants the q-sorts must be analysed in a systematic way using whichever software package has been selected for the research. First the correlation matrix of all Q sorts is calculated, which represents the similarities between each of the sorts. This correlation matrix is then subjected to factor analysis, with the objective of identifying the number of natural groupings (Factors) of Q sorts that are similar or dissimilar to one another (Van Exel & de Graaf, 2005). People with similar viewpoints will share the same factor. A factor loading is determined for each Q sort, expressing the degree to which each Q sort is associated with each factor. In order to extract the factors one of two methods can be used: Principal Component Analysis (PCA) or Centroid Factor Analysis (CFA). In essence both of these methods provide similar results, however the underlying aim for the study should inform which is used. The key difference is that PCA will resolve itself into a single mathematically best solution, which is the one that should be accepted. However, this deprives the researcher of the opportunity to explore the data. CFA on the other hand leaves all possible solutions open allowing the researcher to explore all possibilities through rotation, thus enabling a decision about the best solution and interpretation to be deferred until the data has been fully explored (Watts & Stenner, 2012; Van Exel & de Graaf, 2005; Webler, Danielson & Tuler, 2009).

After the factor analysis has been completed it is then possible to rotate the factors in order to get the best solution. This can be done using a Varimax rotation, which is an algorithm that attempts to rotate the factors so that individuals are only significantly correlated with, or ‘load’ on, one factor. Manual rotation allows the researcher to explore any viewpoints emerging to see how individual perspectives relate (Webler, Danielson & Tuler, 2009). Brown (1980; pp223) argues that “the magic number 7” is generally the suitable number used for extracting factors, within PQMethod it is the default number for extraction. These factors are then subjected to the aforementioned rotation in order to achieve the best solution for the results.

### 3.4.7. Stage 7: Interpreting factors

This stage allows for the production of a series of summarising accounts which explains the viewpoint being expressed by a particular factor. Each of the viewpoints can be presented as a qualitative narrative, incorporating the post-sort information gathered, in order to reflect the viewpoint of the factor (Watts & Stenner, 2005).

## 3.5. Why alternative methods were rejected

Q Methodology is a non-confrontational and indirect method of gathering data in that it is conducted by the individual, on their own (Watts & Stenner, 2012). In comparison to more traditional qualitative research methods such as naturalistic communication, Q-Methodology’s approach to data gathering is very different. Q-Methodology involves sorting a number of statements, usually presented in linguistic form, according to a pre-specified criteria (most agree, most like, or most important etc.). Naturalistic communication involves an ongoing process of a narrative constructed by the participants in response to researcher stimuli, for example an interview. This is then analysed as part of a process where utterances are understood through the combination of the subjective – thoughts, feelings, experiences – and objective aspects which result in meaning making specific to the unfolding dialogue (Stenner, Watts & Worrell, 2008). Q has generally been underused with children and young people to explore educational issues (Hughes, 2016), yet for me seemed the most logical solution to seeking their views when compared to the more naturalistic or quantitative approaches. Willard (2016) would also argue that the less prominent presence of the researcher in the Q-Sort could elicit a more truthful response than alternative methods such as interviewing.

Within a Q methodological approach responding to a statement printed on a piece of paper is an entirely different matter. There are no requirements on a participant to articulate a reply that is deemed appropriate to the question asked, an integral part of the design of Q. Participants are intentionally placed in the position of ‘observer of statements’ and invited to express their alignment towards a large number of these in a controlled format with the benefit of permitting direct comparison with the orientation of other participants. Q-Sort as a data collection form is designed to maximise the expression of qualitative variations and to record these in numerical form. It is assumed that one person’s understanding will differ qualitatively from that of another (Watts & Stenner, 2012).

Willard (2016) would also argue that there is an exploratory nature of the research meaning that Q-methodology can be useful in highlighting further areas of research and, through the qualitative aspects of the post sort questionnaires, additional information can be gained that may not be found from large scale surveys. Another influence in deciding to use Q methodology was the fact that the sample size was unlikely to meet a level where an inferential statistical test could be useful, particularly within the timescale and consent needed to carry out such a study (Willard, 2016).

An alternative to Q would have been to administer all the items in the form of questionnaires that measure the constructs contained within the Q-Sort. However, Q-method allows for the strength of feeling associated with each construct in comparison to other constructs. This is arguably a better representation of the individual students’ voices-even though they are analysed together, their relative feelings and the similarities and differences of their attitudes can be reflected (Willard 2016).

## 3.6. Summary

The above methodology chapter has explored why Q methodology was chosen as the ‘bestfit’ for the research topic in this study, what Q methodology is, and the stages and procedure for undertaking a Q methodological study. The following procedures chapter will explore the personal journey I went through conducting this study using Q methodology.

# Chapter 4: Procedure

## 4.1. Introduction

The previous methodology chapter outlined the structure and stages of carrying out a Q methodological study. This chapter will give an in depth overview of how each stage of the Q methodology process, was carried out from the concourse to Q set, participant information (or p-set), through to data collection and analysis, including reflections from the pilot study and the underlying ethical considerations within the study.

## 4. 2. Stages 1 & 2: From concourse to Q set

In order to gain an insight into the development of the concourse it is pertinent to remind ourselves of the research questions as identified in chapter 2:

* RQ1) What do young people think about the impact that using social media has on their wellbeing?
* RQ2) What do young people think would, or does, improve their experiences of using social media?

At this point it is important to discuss the conflict within the research questions and the design of a Q-set. A Q-set should be designed to meet the requirements of the study, alongside meeting the demands of the research question(s) being posed (Watts & Stenner, 2012). It can be argued that, in order to ensure clarity and integrity within a Q study, a valid Q set should aim not to conflate the categories of policy, change, and experience within one study and should be treated as distinct entities (Watts & Stenner, 2012). However, due to the nature of the statements received during the concourse, and with my inquisition into whether young people’s experiences of using social media would impact on their views on policy and change, and how these experiences were related to the changes suggested, I made the decision to include aspects of all three areas within my Q-set. In essence not only did I want to know if social media was impacting negatively on their well-being and what they felt would be helpful, I wanted to know if there was a link between their experiences and the types of changes that should be made. For example, did the young people who experienced negative perception of their body image think that social media would be better if there was a wider representation of bodies on display?

Originally two schools agreed to take part in the research project. In order to generate a concourse and raise awareness of the research process in preparation for the recruitment of participants, I led an assembly with Young People (YP) aged 13-16. This age range was chosen as 13 is the minimum age requirement for all social media platforms, also this is an understudied age range within this area. The initial assembly discussed the findings from the RSPH (2017) report, as well as contentious headlines from mainstream media. As part of this assembly each young person within the room was asked to write a statement regarding their views on how using social media affects their well-being and return it to me at the end of the assembly. With over 400 statements received this information formed the larger concourse that I needed to reduce down into a Q-set. These ideas were grouped then into common statements (appendix b). Following this I then considered the commonalities between these statements and the changes suggested by the RSPH (2017) and the ‘safe kids search’ website and generated items for the Q-set. When writing the final statements to be trialed as part of the pilot study I ensured to take statements verbatim from the concourse, as this was likely to reflect salient issues to the participant enabling them to attribute meaning to the statement they were reading (Webler, Danielson & Tuler, 2009). These were then trialed as part of a pilot study, and finalised once the pilot study had been completed.

Taking all of the above into account the final Q-set consisted of 49 items (appendix c), which is within the typical limits for a Q-set (Watts & Stenner, 2012).

## 4.3. Stage 3: Participant information

As previously identified in the methodology chapter (3.6.3) large numbers of participants are not required to sustain a good Q methodological study (Watts & Stenner, 2012). For the purpose of this study, and to ensure that each Q-item was making an original contribution to the Q-set, without any overlaps or gaps (Watts & Stenner, 2012) I decided on a minimum of 30, maximum of 40 participants with 49 statements.

Participants were selected from one high school in the North West. The sample was selected due to the high school reporting high levels of mental health needs, and many issues within the school around social media usage. In order to establish whether participants had a defined viewpoint to express (Watts & Stenner, 2012) I set the criteria that they would have to a) have a strong viewpoint on social media to express and/or b) spend three hours or more on social media per day as, according to Frith (2017), 56.2% of 10-15 year olds spend up to three hours on social media per day, this indicates that young people spending above this amount of time on social media may have a more extreme emotional response to it. Participants had a number of options regarding the amount of time they spent on social media, in order for me to highlight any correlations between amount of time spent and the factors identified in the analysis.

Participants were recruited through an informative assembly, this entailed giving information about the study (appendix d, PowerPoint delivered in the assembly) to the young people and asking for them to sign up to take part if they felt that they met the criteria. The young people were able to indicate their interest in participating in the research by requesting a participant information pack (appendix e) at the end of assembly. The overall number of participants was decided by the number of pupils that expressed an interest in taking part in the study and who returned their consent within the time frames given.

37 young people indicated that they wanted to take part in the research; all 37 gave consent, were selected, and their Q sorts included in the data. Out of the 37 participants 10 identified as male and 27 female, their average age was 14 years 7 months with the youngest participant being 14 years old and the eldest 16.

## 4.3.1. Ethical considerations when working with adolescents

This study was carried out in accordance with The British Psychological Society (2014) code of ethics in human research, alongside being subject to ethical review by the University of Sheffield ethical department (appendix a). Alongside these basic ethical considerations, it was pertinent to think about the ethical implications of conducting research with, although referred to as young people, children under the age of 16.

It is often considered that children are a particularly sensitive group of research subjects, and that by carrying out research with them may place extra demands on researchers. For example, children’s participation typically requires consent from caregivers which can make it more difficult to recruit participants. However, researchers have begun to acknowledge that allowing methodological challenges to exclude children from taking part in research is unacceptable (Ellingson et al., 2014). Within Q methodology, particularly when using written statements, I ensured that the statements were accessible to all children that expressed an interest in my research, consideration of language and cognitive level was key when finalising the statements and should adaptions have been needed they would have been made. However, the very nature of Q, I felt, was more ethically sound when conducting research of this nature. Due to the less intimidating way in which Q is administered I felt it was a user-friendly approach for the participants recruited.

Furthermore, it was important for me, in keeping with the ethical guidelines, that the children wishing to take part and their parents/primary caregivers gave their informed consent, and that it was clear that they could withdraw from the study at any given point. In order to achieve this each participant and their parents had to provide consent (appendix f for forms). I also checked in regularly with participants throughout the Q sorting process and asked everyone the same question at the end “are you happy for me to include your date in the research”, thus, reducing the power differentials between me and the participants.

## 4.4. Stage 4: Data collection

This section discusses the way in which I collected the data through the Q sorting process, including a timeline of data collection and reflections on the process.

### 4.4.1. The distribution grid

Following the finalisation of the Q set, I carefully considered the way in which the distribution grid would look. I wanted to ensure that participants were given the opportunity to express their viewpoint effectively. Therefore, I chose to use a forced choice, fixed, normal distribution grid opposed to a free distribution grid for participants to sort the Q items. Watts & Stenner argue that “Q methodologists generally choose a fixed distribution because it represents the most convenient and pragmatic means of facilitating the item ranking process” (2012: 78). I also wanted to ensure a near-normal and symmetrical distribution numbered from a positive to a negative value (as can be seen in figure 1). Typically, this is used in Q as it assumes that people will have a particularly strong view, either positively or negatively, about a comparatively limited number of issues and therefore items (Watts & Stenner, 2012).

A symmetrical distribution numbered in the positive/negative fashion allows the mean ranking value of each and every Q sort to fall at zero. There is nothing absolute to be found in a Q sort. The reason why a particular item has been ranked at 0 will probably become apparent and meaningful during factor interpretation, but until that time the relativity of the sorting process ensures that zero can only mean one more than -1 and one less than +1 (Watts & Stenner, 2012).

It was important to get the range and slope of the distribution right in order to make the participants feel comfortable. Brown (1980) suggests a nine point (-4 to +4) distribution for Q sets of 40 items or less, an 11 (-5 to +5) point distribution for Q sets of 40-60 items and a 13 point (-6 to +6) distribution for Q sets of 60 items and above. However, within my Q set of 49 items I chose to use a 13 point distribution. Watts & Stenner (2012) might argue that this could cause unnecessary decision making for participants. However they also state that a shallower, flatter distribution is suitable for use with participants who are likely to be expert and knowledgeable about the topic, and a steep distribution would be used for those participants more unfamiliar with the topic. So, although it would be recommended for me to use an 11 point distribution (-5 to +5) with the Q set of 49 items, this would have given me a steep distribution. As the criteria for my participants was to have a) a strong opinion on social media and its impact on mental health, and/or b) to use or have previously used social media for 3 hours per day, I felt that they would fit within the more knowledgeable category, and I wanted them to make difficult decisions and have to identify the single item that they agreed with most and the single item that they disagreed with the most. I wanted to see if there was then a correlation between the strongest views and the way in which the rest of the items were sorted.

There is the potential for participants to become upset with a fixed distribution if they are forced to allocate a negative ranking to an item with which they feel agreement or vice versa. A participant might not feel negatively about a particular item, but the very nature of the ranking value can suggest that they do. This potential was alleviated during the Q sorting process by pointing out to participants the inherent relativity of the ranking process. A ranking of -2 for example indicates that an item is probably disagreed with, or otherwise valued, slightly less than the items ranked -1 and slightly more than those at -3. Therefore, when creating the final grid (figure 1) it was important to consider the value given to each of the most opinionated ranking (i.e. -6 and +6), I decided on most agree to most disagree, as I felt it fit better with the research question presented to the participants. Watts & Stenner (2012) argue that this is important as the condition of instruction (question) and the dimension clearly need to make sense in conjunction and that both poles should probably be presented by a most.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Disagree with the most Agree with the most** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| -6 | -5 | -4 | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | +1 | +2 | +3 | +4 | +5 | +6 | |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | |
| **(1)** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | **(1)** | |
|  | **(2)** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | **(2)** |
|  |  | **(3)** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | **(3)** |  |
|  |  |  | **(4)** |  |  |  |  |  | **(4)** |  |
|  |  |  |  | **(5)** |  |  |  | **(5)** |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  | **(6)** |  | **(6)** |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  | **(7)** |  |  |  |  |

Figure 1: Forced distribution grid

### 4.4.2. Pilot study

Following the finalisation of the Q-set and the distribution grid I carried out a pilot study with two participants. The participants were selected as they were the first two to return their consent forms. The Q sorting took place on an individual basis and discussions took place regarding their views on the statements, how they had sorted them and whether they felt they were able to express their viewpoints effectively.

First of all, the research questions needed to be changed into a condition of instruction. This is an instruction presented to participants by which they are to sort all of the Q set items. The condition statement used in the pilot study was “these statements represent the things that people your age might say about using Social Media. Some of the statements are about improving Social Media. Some are designed to help people like me, parents, teachers and other people in your lives to know how best to support young people whose well-being is negatively affected by using Social Media. I would like you to rank the statements from those that you most disagree with to those that you most agree with in order to finish the sentence “Using Social Media…””. “Using social media” was printed in a large font and in bold lettering and placed around the room for participants to refer back to during the sorting process.

The aim of the pilot study was to ensure that the Q-set items were reflective of the current picture regarding social media and the impact it has on the mental health of adolescents. Also, as previously stated the statements were conflated between policy, change, and experience and it was imperative that I checked whether this impacted on participants’ ability to sort the statements in an effective way.

The pilot study appeared to confirm that the Q-set was fit for purpose, and neither participant suggested that changes needed to be made, and both felt as though the statements allowed them to express their viewpoints effectively. Most importantly for me, participants did not feel as though the statements were difficult to sort based on the conflation of the information in them. Participants felt the condition statement was useful, particularly the sentence completion element. Participants identified the pre-and post-sort information (to be detailed within the next section) as being sufficient in allowing them to elaborate further on the way in which they had sorted the statements.

The most significant learning point in this was the amount of time it took for participants to complete the Q sort from start to finish, around an hour. It had been my intention to invite participants to complete their Q sorts on an individual basis, however due to the length of time this would entail and time constraints on the project this now appeared to be unachievable for this study.

### 4.4.3. Collecting the data through Q sorting

As the participants within the pilot study appeared to respond well to the Q-set and the condition statement for the sort neither were changed when collecting the data from the rest of the participants. The Q statements were typed into large boxes 8cm by 5cm so that they would be easy to read and sort.

Participants carried out the Q sorting process during one of their lessons; it was ensured that the room had enough space for participants to complete the Q sort. Something which I considered carefully during the Q sorting process was that of social desirability bias - the desire to provide others with a favourable impression of oneself (Brener, Billy & Grady, 2003), or in this case a favourable impression of social media use. In order to avoid social desirability bias, I saw participants in groups of no more than four young people at a time. Due to the small number of participants and the random way in which they were selected for each group, I found that they were less inclined to discuss where they were placing the cards and less inclined to present them in a way that portrayed their social media use in the best light.

In the sessions I gave participants some further background information to the research, what my intentions were for the findings, and the ethical considerations of taking part (reminding them of their right to withdraw at any point). Additional copies of the Participant Information Pack (appendix e) were available for participants’ reference, along with copies of the consent form. Participants were asked to complete the participant information form (appendix g) which identified their name, age, gender, amount of time they spend using social media per day, and the way in which they used social media. Once completed, they were instructed to open their envelopes containing the Q-set items.

Verbal instructions were given regarding the process for completing the Q sort (appendix h) alongside key supporting information in order to aid completion. I endeavoured to remind participants that this was a subjective process with no right or wrong way to sort the statements. On the table in front of participants were 13 cards numbered -6 to +6 with the number of statements needed for each card also visible (appendix i), as well as an image of the final distribution grid shape so they had a reference point for the shape of their Q sorts. Participants were then asked to complete their Q sort. Throughout the sorting process I checked in with participants that they understood the statements, were identifying enough statements for each column value, and reassuring them that 0 was not necessarily a neutral point in the process.

On completion of their Q sort, participants were asked to check that they were happy with the way in which they had sorted the statements, and if not, invited to move any they felt were in the wrong place. They were then asked, once happy with their Q sort, to complete a post-sort questionnaire (appendix j, Wint, 2013). Whilst participants were completing the questionnaire, I recorded their Q sort using the numbers on the statements onto a blank distribution grid. Participants were then handed a de-brief sheet (appendix k, Wint, 2013) which included my details, and those of useful support networks whom they could contact should they need support.

### 4.4.4. Analysing the data

As detailed in the previous chapter (3.6.6) the data was subject to a by-person factor analysis using PQMethod software (Schmolk, 2014). The data analysis process is detailed within the next chapter (5).

### 4.4.5. Summary

This chapter sought to elucidate how the stages and procedures of a standard Q methodological study were carried out in relation to this study. The following chapter will follow the process of how the information from the Q sorts was extracted into factors and the interpretations of these factors.

# Chapter 5: Results

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter will recap the process of by-person factor analysis within Q methodology in general. It will then subsequently provide a description of the way in which the processes of factor extraction and subsequent factor interpretations were completed in this study. The details of each factor array will then be described qualitatively, including reference to additional qualitative data gained through the post-sort questionnaire, notes made from discussions with participants, any participant comments, and demographic information provided by participants if relevant.

## ***5.2 Factor Analysis in context***

Watts and Stenner (2012) describe the three unique methodological transitions in Q methodology as: 1) the transition from Q sorts to factors, through correlation and factor analysis; 2) the transition from factors to actor arrays, which involves the designated software carrying out a weighted average of all the Q sorts, identifying Q sorts that are significantly correlated with one another; and 3) the transition from factor arrays to factor interpretations, involving researcher interpretations of the correlated statements at a qualitative level.

## 5.3 From Q sorts to factors

37 participants took part in the study. The data was coded to indicate participants’ initials, the year group, age, and gender identity of the participants. Of the 37 participants 10 were male and 27 female. All participants were aged between 13-16 years old with an average age of 14 years 7 months. All participants indicated through the recruitment process that they had a strong view on social media and the impact of its use on their mental health and wanted their voice to be heard. Each completed Q sort was manually entered into a computer programme [PQ Method, version 2.35, Schmolck (2014) is used in this research study] which ascribed a numerical value (in this case -6 to +6) to each of the statements depending upon where it was positioned in the grid. From this, the completed Q sorts were inter-correlated through the process of factor analysis, to ascertain how much each statement agreed, or disagreed with another, for example Q sort 1 with Q sort 2, 1 with 3, 1 with 4 etc., following this a correlation matrix is produced. When using by-person factor analysis, the variables are the individual Q sorts, only through inter-correlation of these individual sorts at a statistical level, is it then possible to analyse the way in which the individual Q sorts group together, eliciting a similarity in viewpoints, or factor.

Centroid Factor Analysis was used to extract the factors, in order to find the *best solution, as,* “in Q methodology it is often worthwhile to rotate factors in keeping with theoretical, as opposed to mathematical, criteria” (Brown, 1980, pg:33). After that, Varimax was used to rotate the factors, which was followed up with hand rotation. This allowed for a maximum number of participants as possible to load on each factor. This extraction option left all possible solutions open and allowed a full exploration of the possibilities through rotation, enabling a decision to be made about the best solution for the data, in this case a five factor rotation, with 27 participants loading in total. The factor matrix which indicates the factors that participants loaded on can be found in appendix l**.**

Usually, factors are extracted which have Eigenvalues (EV) greater than 1.00, those with less than this amount being regarded as showing too little interest to warrant further consideration and therefore only factors with an EV of 1.00 or above were considered in this study (Brown, 1980; Watts & Stenner, 2012). The five factors yielded from this data all had EVs greater than 1.00 with the Kaiser-Guttman Criterion used to determine factor significance, as detailed in Brown (1980). This explained 48% of the variance which, accounted for 27 of the 37 participants. Three or more sorts were identified as significantly loading on each factor (in the unrotated matrix).

Of the remaining ten participants, eight (1, 13, 19, 20, 26, 28, 35 and 36) loaded significantly on more than one factor, with a participant loading of 0.37 reaching significance at p<0.01 using the equation (Watts & Stenner, 2012 pg. 107):

2.58 x (1 ÷ √no. of items in Q set)

2.58 x (1 ÷ √49)

2.58 x (1 ÷ 7)

2.58 x (1 ÷ 0.143)

2.58 x 0.143

0.3689 rounded up to 0.37

As such any Q sort with a rotated factor loading in excess of 0.37 was thought to be closely definitive of the viewpoint of that particular factor (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Table 1 below illustrates the described results.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *Factor number* | *Q Sort Numbers* | *Total* | *Cumulative total* |
| 1 | 21, 30, 37 | 3 | 3 |
| 2 | 6, 8, 9, 17, 25, 27, 32, 34 | 8 | 11 |
| 3 | 2, 5, 12, 23, 24, 31 | 6 | 17 |
| 4 | 7, *10,* 11, 16, 33 | 5 | 22 |
| 5 | 4, 14, 15, 22, 29 | 5 | 27 |
| **Confounded** | 1, 13, 19, 20, 26, 28, 35, 36 | 8 | 35 |
| **Non-Significant** | 3, 18 | 2 | 37 |

Table 1: Distribution of young people's loadings at 0.37 or above

27 of the 37 Q sorts were accounted for within the five factor solution, with three Q sorts representing Factor 1 (F1), eight representing Factor 2 (F2) and so forth. Of the remaining ten Q sorts, eight were confounded with participants loading significantly on more than one factor. The remaining two Q sorts are non-significant, thus not representing any of the factors within the study.

Participant 10 loaded negatively on F4 (p<0.01), creating a bi-polar factor (Watts & Stenner, 2012).

Using the weighted averages for each participant loading on a factor a single Q sort representing each factor was created and is discussed throughout the section 5.5. This was then used in the interpretation of the factors in order to generate a shared viewpoint as a narrative.

## 5.4 From Factors to Factor Arrays

Watts and Stenner (2012) provide straightforward and logical guidance in interpreting Factors which has been followed here, starting with the Factor arrays for the 5 study factors as displayed in Table 2 below. This table denotes the position of each statement in the grid for each of the idealised Q sorts related to the factors, providing a useful tool for factor interpretation. As a reminder, the grid (appendix m) had 13 columns and was numbered from -6 to +6. For example, in the idealised sort used to display factor 1, statement 1 would be positioned in column -4, statement 2 in column +1, statement 3 in column +2 etc. For each of the five factors, the correct grid shape was recreated by positioning each of the statements to make the ideal sort.

These factor arrays, alongside the crib sheet to be discussed later, allowed for a thorough and rigorous approach to interpreting the viewpoints (factors) extracted from the data.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | | *Factor arrays* | | | | |
| *Item number and wording* | | *F1* | *F2* | *F3* | *F4* | *F5* |
| 01 | Lifts my mood when I'm feeling down | -4 | 4 | -1 | 0 | 1 |
| 02 | Is addictive | 1 | -2 | -1 | 4 | 6 |
| 03 | Would be better if there was a pop up heavy usage warning | 2 | -2 | 2 | 3 | 1 |
| 04 | Stops you spending face to face time with people who matter | 1 | -5 | 1 | 5 | -5 |
| 05 | Makes me feel good when people likes the things I post | -1 | 0 | -1 | 0 | -3 |
| 06 | Teaches me new things | -1 | 2 | -1 | 1 | -1 |
| 07 | Makes me feel judged | 0 | -4 | 3 | 3 | -2 |
| 08 | Inspires me to work hard | 0 | 1 | -6 | -4 | 2 |
| 09 | Would be better if it was clear when images had been digitally altered | -2 | -3 | 1 | -2 | -1 |
| 10 | Safety should be taught in school | 3 | 2 | 4 | -1 | 3 |
| 11 | Boosts my self confidence | -6 | 1 | -3 | -6 | -3 |
| 12 | Is upsetting because it puts pressure on me to look a certain way | 3 | -3 | -3 | 5 | 1 |
| 13 | Would be better if professionals supporting used social media | 0 | -2 | 5 | -1 | 2 |
| 14 | Is important to me because I can see what people are up | -2 | 0 | -4 | 0 | -4 |
| 15 | Makes me feel positive about my body image | -5 | -1 | -2 | -4 | -4 |
| 16 | Can cause arguments to escalate quickly | 1 | 0 | 5 | 1 | 2 |
| 17 | Allows me to express my true self | -3 | -1 | -3 | -5 | -2 |
| 18 | Would be better, when an image had been altered, if there was an option to see both pictures | -1 | -4 | 0 | -3 | -3 |
| 19 | Is too easy to send nudes | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | -1 |
| 20 | Stops me getting bored | -1 | 4 | 2 | 4 | -2 |
| 21 | Creates drama because things can be taken the wrong way | 3 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 1 |
| 22 | Can control my life | -4 | -6 | -4 | 2 | -1 |
| 23 | Is not a problem at all for me | -1 | 3 | -1 | -5 | -3 |
| 24 | Should automatically have the highest security settings in place | 5 | 0 | 4 | -2 | 0 |
| 25 | Helps me with learning | -3 | 1 | -2 | -2 | -4 |
| 26 | Would be better if there was no way to be tracked | 6 | 1 | 2 | -2 | 0 |
| 27 | Is important because I can keep in touch with friends | 2 | 5 | 3 | 6 | 0 |
| 28 | Makes me feel good | -4 | 1 | -2 | -3 | -2 |
| 29 | Would be better if there was a wider representation of body types | -1 | 2 | -2 | 2 | 0 |
| 30 | Can make me lazy | 0 | -1 | 0 | 3 | -1 |
| 31 | Can be a good distraction from offline experiences, e.g. bereavement | -3 | 6 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| 32 | Would be better if apps had a maximum time usage on them | 0 | -4 | -2 | 1 | -5 |
| 33 | Makes it easier to get bullied | 0 | 2 | 6 | 0 | 5 |
| 34 | Motivates me | -2 | 3 | -4 | -3 | 1 |
| 35 | Would be better if language was censored depending on age | 1 | -1 | 1 | 0 | -1 |
| 36 | Would be better if it was easier to report bullying | 4 | 0 | 0 | -2 | 4 |
| 37 | Would be better if people posted more positive comments | 4 | 1 | 1 | -1 | 3 |
| 38 | Wastes a lot of time | 2 | -2 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| 39 | Is important because I can keep in touch with family | 2 | 4 | -1 | 3 | 2 |
| 40 | Is annoying because people can block you | -5 | -3 | -5 | -4 | -6 |
| 41 | Would be better if you knew who you were speaking to all of the time | 2 | -2 | 0 | -1 | 1 |
| 42 | Would be better if it was easier to find support for personal issues | 4 | -1 | 0 | -3 | 4 |
| 43 | Is entertaining | -2 | 5 | 3 | 2 | 4 |
| 44 | Is upsetting because I compare my life to other people's lives | 5 | -5 | -5 | 4 | 0 |
| 45 | Would be better if all indecent images were censored | 1 | -1 | 2 | -1 | 3 |
| 46 | Would be better if grim images were censored | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 3 |
| 47 | Would be better if people who were reported for saying/doing mean things got a time limited ban | 3 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 5 |
| 48 | Is important because you can send messages for free | -2 | 3 | 0 | -1 | 0 |
| 49 | Makes me stressed | -3 | -3 | -3 | 1 | -2 |

Table 2: Factor arrays for the five study factors

Note that 0 does not always represent a position of neutrality or insignificance within a factor; often for particular items it may lead to a more important interpretation. This can be seen with statement 18 and the F3 viewpoint, with factors 1, 2, 4, and 5 positioning 18 at -1 or below, we can be more confident in stating that, instead of feeling neutral about it, the F3 viewpoint is more inclined to think that Social Media would be better if there was an option to see original images alongside their edited counterparts.

## 5.5 From Factor Arrays to Interpretation

The final step in the data analysis process within Q methodology is the factor interpretations. This was carried out through an examination of the statistical data provided by factor extraction and rotation. In order to further understand the factor arrays the qualitative comments elicited from participants are included within the interpretations. These comments are qualitative in nature and were generated as part of the post–sort questionnaire (appendix j) completed by every participant, and informal discussions as part of the sorting process. This made it possible to try and better understand each of the five factors.

The first step to full interpretation of the factors began with the factor arrays as detailed in table 2 above, followed then by the crib sheet (appendices q through u) for each factor. The crib sheet is a systematic approach to factor interpretation that aided with the delivery of holistic factor interpretations (Watts & Stenner, 2012). The crib sheet is a way of ensuring that nothing gets overlooked and is created by paying close attention to the relative item rankings contained in table 2, starting with item 1 and working through the Q set in order, and item by item. By using the crib sheet, through cutting and pasting of statements and re-drafting, the viewpoint emerging in each factor became more evident.

For each factor, distinguishing statements (appendix n through r, identified on crib sheets) were also highlighted and considered to ensure a full representation was encapsulated within each factor description. The resulting titles were created in a way that related to the elicited descriptions.

Information from participant information sheets (appendix g) and the post-sort questionnaire and field notes were looked at to see if any comments arose that would clarify the description further. In the description below for factor 1, and for each of the following factor descriptions, each of the statements is followed by numbers in brackets. The first number denotes the number of the statement being discussed, with the second number denoting the position of the statement in as placed in the ideal Q sort, for example ‘participants expressed that using social media makes them feel judged’ would be represented as (07, -4).

For each factor a number of statements were ranked the same within other factors (see appendices n through rfor crib sheet interpretation), in some cases these statements also added to the viewpoint arising within the factors and as such were included in the interpretation of the factor.

### 5.5.1 Factor Correlations

Data analysis obtained from the Q sorts revealed a five factor solution. It was noted that there was a raised correlation between factors 1 and 3, 1 and 5 and 3 and 5. Table 3 below highlights the correlation between factor scores at a significance level of 0.37. Within this section I will discuss the similarities between the correlated factors and provide an explanation as to why a five factor solution was retained, despite the more highly correlated factors.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1 | 1.00 | -0.04 | 0.42\* | 0.33 | 0.52\* |
| 2 | -0.04 | 1.00 | 0.28 | -0.07 | 0.31 |
| 3 | 0.42\* | 0.28 | 1.00 | 0.20 | 0.43\* |
| 4 | 0.33 | -0.07 | 0.20 | 1.00 | 0.17 |
| 5 | 0.52\* | 0.31 | 0.43\* | 0.17 | 1.00 |

Table 3: Correlation between Factor Scores; \* indicates significant correlation

When looking at the similarities between factors 1 and 3, participants shared the viewpoints that using social media can stop you spending face to face time with people that matter (03; -2) and valued safety features such as censoring language and being able to block people. They also felt that being taught how to use social media safely was important as it is too easy to send nudes (04; +1, 35; +1, 40; -5, 19; +1). They felt strongly that their social media use would be better if it was easier to report bullying (36; +4) and that it does not allow them to express their true selves (17; -3). Participants also shared the view that using social media could be problematic (23; -1) but a pop up heavy usage warning would not be helpful (03; -2). They did not agree that people liking their posts made them feel good or that it teaches them new things, they also did not agree that using social media makes them lazy or control their lives (05; -1, 06; -1, 30; 0, 22; -4). Despite an overall negative view of social media, they did not identify that it made them stressed (49; -3).

Similarly, to Factor 3, participants in Factors 1 and 5 shared the viewpoint that using social media safely should be taught in schools (10; +3). However, factors 1 and 5 also shared other aspects, in contrast to that of Factor 3. Participants across factors 1 and 5 felt strongly that social media would be better if it was easier to find support for personal issues, and that using social media wastes a lot of time and they do not find it teaches them new things (42; +4, 38; -1, 06 – 1). Positively, they agreed that using social media is important for keeping in touch with their family (39; +2).

Participants in factors 3 and 5 also displayed some similarities in that they did not feel that using social media boosts their self-confidence or makes them feel good (11; -3, 28; -2). They did not agree nor disagree strongly that social media is a good distraction from offline experiences, nor that people being able to block them is important (31; 0, 40; 0). However, they do agree that it would be better if grim images were censored (46; +3). It is not important for these participants that they can see what others are up to, nor do they feel it teaches them new things (14; -4, 6; -1).

Despite the higher correlation between the above factors, when looking at the distinguishing statements across the factors and the most highly ranked items (please refer to the crib sheets in appendices n-r) it was clear that, although there were some similarities within the viewpoints, the essence of what the participants were saying about their social media use was distinct enough to give it value in its own right. In the following sections I will elucidate the distinct viewpoints emerging from each of the factors, paving the way for the discussion chapter to follow.

### 5.5.2 Full Interpretation of Factor 1

***‘Using social media puts pressure on body image and how you feel you should live your life; safe use of social media should be taught’***

Factor 1 has an Eigenvalue of 2.96 and explains 8% of the study variance. Three participants are significantly associated with this factor (participants 21, 30 and 37): two males and one female, whose average age is 15. These participants spend between 0-4 hours on social media per day and their main usage is to connect with friends, follow inspirational people, and to send memes. Participant 21 was the highest loading participant in the factor and participant 30 the second highest loading participant.

Through studying the consensus and distinguishing statements (appendix n) within the factor it appeared that there were two main themes that the young people within Factor 1 share: Negative feelings about themselves and how they live their lives (1; -3, 28; -4, 15; -6, 42; +5, 44; +5, 11; -6) and the importance of safety when using social media (4; +2, 24 +5, 26; +6).

Participants who hold this factor viewpoint do not see social media as a way of lifting their mood when they are feeling down also, using social media does not make them feel good and does not improve their positivity about their body image (1; -4, 28; -4, 15; -5). Most importantly using social media does not boost their self-confidence (11, -6) “*I think it makes you feel more self-conscious and makes you feel more insecure when looking at celebrities and models etc.”* (participant 21).

There is also some agreement that the pressure to look a certain way is upsetting (12; +3) “*people may feel they have to look a certain way” (participant 21)*. Participants in this group further think that it would be better if people posted more positive comments (37; +4) with participant 37 saying “*people need to get out of their glass boxes and start to be more accepting of people”.* These participants also find comparing their lives to other people’s lives upsetting (44; +5) reinforced by participant 30 who said, “*I feel more guilty when I look at other people’s posts having fun, which makes me think that my life is boring and depressing”.* Despite all of this using social media does not make them stressed (49; -3).

Within this factor viewpoint participants also expressed that they value safety and security online, identifying that it would be better if: they knew who you were speaking to all of the time; and if the highest security settings were in place when they first signed up to an app (41; +2, 24; +5). Furthermore, they think the biggest improvement would be if there was no way to be tracked (26; + 6), with participant 30 stating that “b*ullies can still find a way to track you”* and participant 21 “*it is easy to find people on social media and people you may not know may know many things about you”*. Because of this they do not necessarily see social media as a good distraction from offline experiences, for example bereavement or exam stress and think that using social media safely should be taught in schools (31; -3, 10+3).

Two other strong aspects of the viewpoints held by these participants is that they place little value on sending free messages, and using social media is not particularly entertaining (48; -2, 43; -2).

Interestingly, in the post sort discussion, participant 37 explained that he had stopped going on social media as it had previously had a negative impact on his well-being and he realised that *“I am a much better person, and don’t miss out on as much now I don’t go on Instagram or Snapchat.”*

### 5.5.3 Full Interpretation of Factor 2

***‘Using social media is important for connecting with others and is entertaining. It is not a problem for me; in fact, it makes me feel good!’***

Factor 2 has an Eigenvalue of 5.18 and explains 14% of the study variance. Eight participants are significantly associated with this factor (participants 6, 8, 9, 17, 25, 27, 32 and 34): two males and six females, whose average age is 15. These participants spend between 0-6 hours on social media per day and their main usage is to connect with friends and family, connect with others, follow inspirational people, keep updated on their interests, and to send memes. Participant 32 was the highest loading participant in the Factor and participant 9 the second highest loading participant.

Through studying the consensus and distinguishing statements (appendix o) within the factor it appeared that there were three main themes that the young people within Factor 2 share: Social media is entertaining, important for connecting with others (31; +6, 43; +5, 28; +1, 34; +3, 39; +4, 48; +3), and using social media does not negatively affect their wellbeing (2; -2, 7; -4, 18; -4, 22 -6).

Participants within this factor view social media as a good distraction from offline experiences, such as bereavement and exam stress (31; +6) as it lifts their mood when they are feeling down (01; +4) *“…after a bad day going on social media often helps me relax”* (participant 34). *“I go online when I am stressed to feel better”* (participant 25), *“it can help you escape from stress and be more happy” (participant 6)*. Social media is entertaining motivating, and stops them getting bored (43; +5, 34; +3, 20; +4) *“…me and my friends always have fun talking to each other etc.”* (participant 27), *“…it can make you feel less bored and motivates you to do new things”* (participant 9). These participants think that using social media teaches them new things and helps them with their learning (06; +2, 25; +1). Social media does not control their lives, nor is it addictive or a waste of time (22; -6, 02; -2, 38; -20. It would not be better if apps had a pop up heavy usage warning (03; -2). Using social media is not a problem at all for them (23; +3).

Participants felt that it is important they can send messages for free as it means they can stay connected with their friends and family, as such they agree that using social media does not inhibit face to face contact with people who matter (48; +3, 27; +5, 39; +4, 04; -5) *“…social media can help you to arrange to go out with your friends and it doesn’t stop you”*. Interestingly participant 25 highlighted that this aspect of relationships can also be troublesome for them *“If I argue with a friend online I will stress about it all night and be worried to go on my phone”,* with participant 32 stating *“…if you see all of your friends out together and they didn’t ask you it can make you feel annoyed and upset at them”.* Despite the negative view expressed about relationships participants did not think that using social media necessarily causes arguments to escalate quickly (16; 0). More so than any other factor they do not think that time limited bans would be effective for those people reported for saying or doing mean things (47; 0).Furthermore, knowing who you are speaking to all of the time is not important for these participants (41; -2).

These participants did not agree that social media would be better if it was clear when images were digitally altered, or if you could see both the altered and unaltered images (09; -3, 18; -4) *“…people should be allowed to alter their images if they like”* (participant 6)*.*  Feeling judged was not something they experience nor does it put pressure on them to look a certain way in fact using social media boosts their self-confidence and makes them feel more positive about their body image (11; +1, 15; -1), however they would like to see a wider representation of body types (29; +2). Interestingly participant 6 states *“some people also promote positive body images”* and “*it would be better if there was more wide range of body types so people don’t feel left out”.*  Overall using social media makes them feel good and somewhat allows them to express their true selves (07; -4, 12; -3, 28; +1, 17; -1).

### 5.5.4 Full interpretation of Factor 3

***‘Using social media affects my relationships with others, makes me feel judged, and makes it easier to get bullied’***

Factor 3 has an Eigenvalue of 3.7 and explains 10% of the study variance. Six participants are significantly associated with this factor (participants 2, 5, 12, 23, 24, 31): three males and three females, whose average age is 15. These participants spend between 3-8 hours on social media per day and their main usage is to connect with friends, follow inspirational people and send memes. Participant 2 was the highest loading participant in the Factor and participant 12 the second highest loading participant.

Through studying the consensus and distinguishing statements within the factor (appendix p) it appeared that there was one main idea that the young people within Factor 3 share: Using social media affects relationships with others, makes it easier to get bullied on line and causes feelings of being judged (33; +6; 16; + 5, 21; +4, 07; +3).

Participants within Factor 3 share the idea that using social media makes it easier to get bullied (33; +6) *“I was cyberbullied and that’s why the bullying statement is so important to me”* (participant 24) *“…people can bully people very easily as it can be anonymous”* (participant 12). Using social media also affects their relationships with others causing arguments to escalate quickly and drama between friends(16; +5, 21; +4) *“…it causes unwanted drama, stress and anxiety”* (participant 24). These participants do not use social media to see what others are up to, particularly family members (14; -4, 39; -1).

Using social media can make them feel judged and does not make them feel good about their body image (07; +3, 15; -2). They would prefer to know if images had been altered, and have the option to see both the original and the altered image however they do not think it is necessary for a wider representation of body types to be displayed on social media (9; +1, 18; 0, 29; -2). They do not get upset through comparing their lives with others (44; -5). Social media is not motivating to them and it does not inspire them to work hard (34; -4, 08; -6).

As discussed above, like factor 1, these participants viewed keeping safe online as important; they think that using social media safely should be taught in school (10; +4) *“people can hack your account way too easy and there’s no regulations”* (participant 23). Unlike factor 1 these participants strongly agree that the highest security settings should be in place when joining an app (24; +4).

Interestingly these participants also think that professionals who are supporting those with issues relating to social media use should use social media themselves (13; +5).

### 5.5.5 Full Interpretation of Factor 4

***‘Using social media is a problem for me; it makes me feel judged and I cannot express my ‘true’ self on there’***

Factor 4 has an Eigenvalue of 2.96 and explains 8% of the study variance. Five participants are significantly associated with this factor (participants 7, *10*, 11, 16 and 33): all were females, whose average age is 15. These participants spend between 3-6 hours on social media per day and their main usage is to connect with friends and send memes. Participant 11 was the highest loading participant in the Factor and participant 16 the second highest loading participant. Interestingly, within this factor participant 10 loaded negatively on this factor and represents an opposite viewpoint to that shared by participants 7, 11, 16 and 33, creating a bipolar factor (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Thus, where these participants agreed more with an item, participant 10 would exhibit a near reverse or mirror image configuration of the items in the ideal Q sort.

Through studying the consensus and distinguishing statements (appendix q) within the factor it appeared that there was one main idea that the young people within Factor 4 share: Using social media is problematic for them, affects their self-confidence and can cause feelings of being judged and does not represent their “true self” (11; -6, 17; -5, 23; -5).

Participants within this factor share the viewpoint that the most important aspect of using social media is to keep in touch with their friends (27; +6) “*… friends are very important in my life and I can’t see them every day but I can talk to them through social media”* (participant 7); despite this it can stop them spending face to face time with people that matter (04; +5). Using social media is less likely to cause drama through things being taken the wrong way (21; 0). The bipolar viewpoint from factor 10 somewhat disagrees with these statements, they do not regard social media as important for keeping in touch with friends (27; 0) and disagree that things can being taken the wrong way creates drama (21; -2).

These participants find using social media is does not make them feel good about their body image nor does it boost their self-confidence (12; +5, 11; -6) *“it can be upsetting because it puts pressure on people to look a certain way because people only post the best pictures of themselves making people feel pressured to look like them”* (participant 16) making them feel judged (07; +3). They think it would be better if there was a wider representation of body types (29; +2). Using social media does not allow these participants to express their “true” selves (17; -5) *“you could become or act a certain way because you see other people or social media celebrities doing that”* (participant 11). When analysing the bipolar factor, their views represent a mirror image, (12; -4, 11; +3, 07; -2, 29; -4, 17, 0), indicating that using social media does not have the same impact on their perceptions of body image and feelings of judgement.

Using social media can be problematic for these participants, they find that it can control their lives and make them lazy (23; -5, 22; +2, 30; +3) *“social media can waste a lot of time as people can spend hours on there”* (participant 16). Therefore, it would be better if there was a pop up heavy usage warning, such as “you have been on social media for X amount of time, maybe you should take a break”, and if apps had a maximum time usage on them (03; +3, 32; +1). Using social media can make these participants stressed (49; +1). Although, again, participant 10 (bipolar factor) displayed a near mirror image of these viewpoints (22; -1, 30; -2, 03; -1, 32; -1, 49; -4) with a clear disagreement that using social media makes them feel stressed. In fact, it appears that for participant 10 their views are similar to those of factor 2 and they have mainly positive experiences. As such, using social media is not problematic for them (23; +1).

These participants do not agree that using social media safely should be taught in school, nor is it greatly important to them that the highest security settings are in place (10; -1, 24; -2). They think being able to be tracked is a good feature, with participant 16 stating in the post sort discussion that *“I think it’s good you can be tracked because it lets your parents know where you are, also you can just turn tracking off so it doesn’t need to be a thing within the app”*. These participants agree less that online support for personal issues, an easier way to report bullying, or more positive comments online would improve their social media experiences (42; -3, 36; -2, 37; -1). Once more, the bipolar factor of participant 10 expressed a viewpoint in opposition of the other participants. They agreed the most that using social media would be better if it was easier to report bullying (36; +6), and valued the safety features that the other participants appeared not to, which is more in line with a Factor 5 viewpoint (42; +3, 37; +1).

### 5.5.6 Full Interpretation of Factor 5

***‘Using social media is addictive and should be moderated more effectively’***

Factor 5 has an Eigenvalue of 2.96 and explains 8% of the study variance. Five participants are significantly associated with this factor (participants 4, 14, 15, 22, and 29): four females and one male, whose average age is 15. These participants spend between 0-8+ hours on social media per day and their main usage is to connect with friends and family and to keep updated on their interests. Participant 4 was the highest loading participant in the Factor and participant 15 the second highest loading participant.

Through studying the consensus and distinguishing statements (appendix r) within the factor it appeared that there was one main idea that the young people within Factor 5 share: Using social media is addictive and there are things that can be done to make their experiences more positive (02; +6, 47; +5, 45; +3, and 46; +3).

Participants within Factor 5 share the viewpoint that social media is addictive (02; +6) *“…with how much social media we have it can get really addictive, and we always want to be on it”* (participant 22)*.* They agree that it wastes their time, does not help with learning, and it does not stop them from getting bored (38; +2, 25; -4, 20; -2). Despite this they do not agree that it would be better if apps had a maximum time usage on them (32; -5).

It is important for these participants that people can be blocked on social media *“…sometimes people can say certain things that make them feel terrible all due to them “popping up” but the ability to block assists that to be stopped”* (participant 29), that people who are reported for negative behaviour received a time limited ban, and it was easier to report bullying (40; -6, 47; +5, 36; +4). They also think that it is too easy to send nude images (19; -1) *“so many people get exposed through it and it can have a negative effect”* (participant 4) with a slightly differing view participant 15 stated *“everyone has control over their own bodies and although it is easy to send nudes, it’s more about the interaction between the person and someone putting pressure on them, which is why younger accounts should be monitored”*. Therefore, it would be better if indecent and grim images were automatically censored (45; +3, 46; +3) interestingly participant 29 stated that *“what some people determine as “indecent” can be different”.*

## 5.6. Additional information gained from the post sort questionnaire

Question 6: *“Do you think that Social Media would be better if there was a way that platforms could identify users who could be suffering from Mental Health issues through what they put online and then direct them to support?”*

Of the 37 participants 25 agreed that this would improve social media, 4 disagreed, 7 were neutral and 1 did not respond. Interestingly participant 7 (significantly loading on F4) suggested a “*hidden platform”* where this support was offered and participant 15 (significantly loading on F5) felt that it would be useful as there is *“no support in real life”,* and participant 3 said *“yes, as some people may search worrying things and should be reached out to by the app or website for example self-harm and depression”.* Disagreeing participant 25 (significantly loading on F2) suggested that *“sometimes people might not want people to know they have mental health issues”.*

Question 7: *“Do you think that using social media negatively impacts on your well-being?”*

Of the 37 participants 19 responded yes with some interesting comments: participant 24 (significantly loading on F3) *“it causes unwanted drama, stress and anxiety”, p*articipant 12 (significantly loading on F3) *“If people use it negatively against me it is a bit hurtful and not nice and makes me unhappy”*; 10 participants responded with neutrality such as participant 14 (significantly loading on F5) *“depending on what I am looking at I think social media can affect my wellbeing both negatively and positively”* and participant 23 (significantly loading on F3) *“yes and no because it can and can’t impact your life depending on how you look at life”*; and 8 participants responded no with participant 6 (significantly loading on F2) saying *“No, I believe it helps you stay in contact with others and some people also promote positive body image. I think it lets you express yourself and your passions”,* participant 34 (significantly loading on F2) saying *“after a bad day going on social media helps me relax”*, and participant 28 (non-significant Q sort) explaining that *“it distracts me from other negative things in general”.*

## 5.7. Summary

The data obtained through analysis of the Q sorts yielded a five factor solution, each of the five viewpoints identified shared some common themes: connection to others, safety, feeling judged and a negative self-perception. The five factors have been discussed in turn clearly highlighting why they are distinct and different from each other. Alongside these viewpoints suggestions were made on how social media use could be improved for participants. Further exploration of the questions asked in the post sort interviews, indicates that participants may have additional viewpoints to those extracted.

In the ‘Discussion’ chapter to follow, the research undertaken will be critiqued and further research opportunities discussed. Comparisons will be drawn between the results from this study and the existing literature, and reference will be made to how this contributes to the knowledge how young people’s experiences on social media impact on their mental wellbeing. Suggested strategies of support will also be discussed in relation to findings from this data and the existing literature, as well as the implications for schools and the practice of Educational Psychologists.

# Chapter 6: Discussion

## 6.1. Introduction

The previous Results chapter documented the analytical process of this Q-methodological study and how this was applied to the data gathered for this study, resulting in a five factor solution consisting of the following themes:

* Using social media puts pressure on body image and how you feel you should live your life; safe use of social media should be taught.
* Using social media is important for connecting with others and is entertaining. It is not a problem for me; in fact, it makes me feel good!
* Using social media affects my relationships with others, makes me feel judged, and makes it easier to get bullied.
* Using social media is a problem for me; it makes me feel judged and I cannot express my ‘true’ self on there.
* Using social media is addictive and should be moderated more effectively.

This chapter will begin by revisiting the aims of the study and the research questions developed in chapter 2. Following this, a critical review of the results in relation to the literature will be discussed. As highlighted in chapter 5 (Results) there were also a number of similarities within the data, which will be discussed in further detail in the section to follow.

## 6.2. Aims and Research Questions revisited

The original research questions set out to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of social media use in adolescents (aged 13-16) and the impact that these experiences have on their mental health and wellbeing, as well as looking at ways that adolescents could be supported should they find their wellbeing negatively affected by social media use. Research questions were devised following a review of the current literature and consisted of:

* RQ1) What do young people think about the impact that using social media has on their wellbeing?
* RQ2) What do young people think would, or does, improve their experiences of using social media?

The aim of this study was to explore young people’s experiences of using social media and try to establish ways in which we could improve these to minimise any potential risks to their mental wellbeing. Q methodology was used, which generated a five factor solution. Analysis of the data revealed some correlations between statements across some of the factors, particularly feelings of being judged on social media (Factors 1, 3 and 4), and the importance of moderating social media use (1, 2, 3, and 5). However, there are some clear differences between the viewpoints identified, which are briefly summarised below:

* Factor 1 relates to participants feelings of self-perception including body image concerns, comparing their lives with other people’s lives, and not feeling good about themselves. These participants offered suggestions on external support systems for improving their social media use.
* Factor 2 participants expressed positive views on using social media, keeping in touch with friends, a good distraction from offline experiences, lifting their mood when feeling down and motivating. Participants loading on this factor expressed that using social media is not a problem at all for them.
* Factor 3 presented a viewpoint relating to relationships, including drama and arguments between friends. These participants felt strongly that using social media made it easier to get bullied. These participants also valued safety online.
* Factor 4 participants expressed the negative impacts that using social media has on their wellbeing, feeling strongly that they should present a certain version of themselves online. This factor was a bi-polar factor with one participant loading negatively and demonstrating an opposing viewpoint.
* Factor 5 relates to participants’ view that social media is addictive and wastes time, however, did not perceive a time limit or pop up heavy usage warning would be helpful. These participants expressed that it is too easy to send nudes, which is a statement that was expressed during the concourse, and therefore it would be better if indecent images were censored. These participants expressed the idea that social media use should be moderated more effectively by the platforms.

These differences across factors indicate that there is considerable heterogeneity in the viewpoints expressed. However, as previously identified there are some similarities and themes across factors which will be explored in more detail further on in the discussion. Firstly, I aim to explore how each of the factor viewpoints relate to the research discussed within the literature review (chapter 2), and what the participants’ viewpoints are telling us might be done about the issues that are being presented.

## 6.3. How do the extracted viewpoints relate to existing literature?

In the following chapter sub sections I will explore how each of the factors relate to the existing literature discussed in the sections 2.5.1.2.1 to 2.5.1.2.5, whilst making suggestions of what can be done to support adolescents whose social media use may be having a negative impact on their mental wellbeing. I will then discuss any new knowledge that has been elicited from the five factors. Within this chapter it will be clear how RQ1 “What do young people think about the impact that using social media has on their wellbeing?” and RQ2 “What do young people think would, or does, improve their experiences of using social media?” have been answered through the research process.

### 6.3.1. What do the extracted viewpoints tell us about what young people think about the impact that using social media has on their wellbeing?

The argument explored in the literature review, that using social media can pose a potential risk to young people’s mental wellbeing, can also be seen in the viewpoints elicited from Factors 1, 3, 4 and 5. As highlighted within the literature review O’Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson (2011, p.g.802) quantified the particular social media risks dubbed as “Facebook depression”. Interestingly the main reason identified for young people developing “Facebook depression” is the amount of time that they spend using social media, which formed a large basis of the arguments within the initial literature review that the more time young people spend online the higher the potential risks (Pantic et al., 2016; Sampasa-Kanyinga & Lewis, 2015; Shensa et al., 2017).

This argument lends itself well to the viewpoint extracted from factor 4, where participants identified that they spend between 3-6 hours on social media per day and reported that their use was problematic in terms of the impact it has on their wellbeing, as it can make them lazy, puts pressure on them to look a certain way and makes them feel judged. In further support of this argument is the viewpoint extracted from factor 3, where participants identified one of the largest ranges of time spent on social media with some spending up to eight hours per day on social media apps.

However, this study also produced contrary results regarding the amount of time spent on social media and the impact on wellbeing. For example, participants within factors 1 and 2, who spent less time on social media than those in any other factor (F1 0-4 hours, F2 0-6 hours), also reported that social media can create drama amongst peers as things can be taken the wrong way, suggesting that language and interpretation of social media posts can also contribute to the impact using social media has on relationships.

Furthermore, participants within factor 1, who spent the least amount of time on social media (0-4 hours), reported the most significant impact on their self-perception including: feeling that social media does not boost their self-confidence, does not make them feel good about their body image, and they expressed feelings of being upset when comparing their lives with other people’s. This is also contrary to the findings from Kelly et al. (2018) and Marengo et al. (2018) who found that the *more* time spent on social media the bigger the impact on body image.

In the post sort questionnaire participants were asked if they thought that social media negatively impacts on their wellbeing. With 19 out of the 37 participants responding *yes*, 10 responding neutrally and 8 responding *no*, this provides further support for the argument that the impact of social media use on adolescent mental wellbeing can be both positive and negative and it is not yet fully understood what it is about social media use that affects adolescent wellbeing. What the viewpoints from this research suggests is that, although the amount of time adolescents spend on social media can impact on their mental wellbeing, looking at the amount of time spent on social media in isolation may not be an effective way to understand difficulties arising from social media usage.

#### 6.3.2.1. What can be done to support the impact of social media on adolescent wellbeing?

When looking at the ‘would be better if’ statements used in the Q set, it was clear that participants within factor 1 held a strong view that support for personal issues should be more readily available to social media users. Participants sharing a factor 3 viewpoint expressed that it would be important that those trying to support them through social media related issues were social media users themselves. In terms of previous research, it has been widely suggested that adolescents should be encouraged to reflect on their own behaviour regarding social media use and try and adjust their approach to minimize the impact, with education of adolescents and policy changes key to ensuring this approach worked (Radovic et al., 2017; Lin et al., 2016; RSPH, 2017, Brand, 2018). A simplistic view that adolescents should spend less time on social media has also been suggested (Sampasa-Kanyinga & Lewis, 2015). This shows a disparity in how adolescents from this study feel they should be supported compared to previous research, with participants in this study recognising external support, e.g. the platforms or professionals, and previous research suggesting intrinsic changes. Therefore, it would be reasonable to suggest that a balance of support systems needs to take place, encouraging social media users to be more autonomous in the changes they need to make, but by external support systems providing them with the tools to do so.

### 6.3.2. What do the extracted viewpoints tell us about the impact of social media use on self-esteem?

When looking at the extracted viewpoints, participants within factor 1 elicited the strongest view on the negative impact that social media has on their self-esteem. These participants expressed that using social media is upsetting when they compare their lives to other people’s lives and does not boost their self-confidence. This is not surprising when looking at the existing literature, with Steers et al. (2014), highlighting that adolescents are more likely to feel depressed when online as they compare their lives to others making them feel bad.

The factor 4 viewpoint also elicited strong views on the impact of social media on self-esteem. The participants holding this viewpoint felt that social media did not allow them to express their “true self” *“you could become or act a certain way because you see other people or social media celebrities doing that”* (participant 11). This can also be found within the literature, in particular Weinstein (2018) finding that using social media was a positive way for individuals to express themselves, yet at the same time adolescents worrying about how others’ judge these self-expressions. Negative emotions arise related to immediate concerns about peer judgements and lack of acceptance. Further findings indicated that some participants delete their Instagram posts should they not reach a certain number of likes by their peers, with some deleting if they receive fewer than 200 likes. Research has also found that young people often have more than one social media account on which to “express themselves”. More concerns appear to arise from using their “real” account in terms of feeling judged and having a negative impact on their self-perception. As their fake accounts, or “finsta” (fake Instagram) accounts, are the ones they use for connecting with their close friends, teens have reported feelings of security and the ability to express their “true” selves without necessarily worrying about being judged. Again, highlighting that depending on *how* adolescents are using social media platforms determines the impact on wellbeing.

Valkenburg et al. (2006) found that the impact on self-esteem depended on the types of feedback users were getting on their posts. They found that the more positive feedback received, the higher the self-esteem, where negative feedback decreased self-esteem. Interestingly, contrary to the notion that good feelings arise from people liking posts and making positive comments online, participants from factor 5 actually disagreed more than any other factor that other people liking their posts makes them feel good, and felt that social media would be better if people posted more positive comments.

It was evident when comparing the viewpoints extracted from the five factors, that a strong theme of feeling judged when using social media was a common emerging theme, which is also common among the existing literature as discussed above.

Interestingly, participants within factor 2, and the bipolar viewpoint from factor 4, expressed that they do not find it upsetting when they compare their lives with others, with participants from factor 2 and to a lesser extent factor 3, also expressing that using social media actually boosts their self-confidence. In fact, this group of participants, more than any other, felt that likes on their posts made them feel good and that using social media does not put pressure on them to look a certain way and that they are able to express their true selves. This is also supported by previous research highlighting that teens attribute positive emotions to sharing their lives, interests, humour, and receiving positive feedback on their posts, and found that in some cases using social media improved users’ self-esteem (Weinstein, 2018; Valkenburg, Koutamanis, & Vossen, 2017).

### 6.3.3. What do the extracted viewpoints tell us about the impact of social media on body image?

Analysis of the data indicated that participants’ views from factor 1 had the strongest feelings that social media can cause negative feelings about their body image. *“I think it (using social media) makes you feel more self-conscious and makes you feel more insecure when looking at celebrities and models etc.”* (participant 21). These participants, alongside those from factors 1 and 3, also felt that there is a pressure to look a certain way which can cause further upset *“it can be upsetting because it puts pressure on you to look a certain way because people only post the best pictures of themselves making people feel pressured to look like them”* (participant 16). This is in line with that of previous research which found that adolescents are more likely to have negative feelings about their body image when looking at highly visual media (Marengo et al., 2018). Interestingly, Kelly et al., (2018) found that the more time that adolescents spent on social media the more likely they were to be dissatisfied with their body image, however, participants from factor 1 in this study identified that they spent the least amount of time using social media per day (0-4 hours). This suggests that the amount of time spent looking at images may not be as relevant as originally thought, and that adolescents are at risk of becoming dissatisfied with their body image regardless of how much time is spent on social media.

Interestingly participants from factor 2, and the bipolar factor 4, had completely opposing views and actually expressed that using social media makes them feel more positive about their body image. Burnette et al.’s study (2017) also found that there was potential for girls to become dissatisfied with their body image through viewing images on social media; however this was not due to a number of protective factors included in the school curriculum to help establish emotional resilience and self-esteem, or the teaching of social media literacy.

#### 6.3.3.1. What can be done to support the impact of social media on self-esteem and body image?

As self-esteem and body image appear to be closely linked in terms of how social media experiences could be better, I have discussed both within this section.

In terms of participant viewpoints, factor 1 felt that social media would be better if people posted more positive comments with participant 37 stating *“people need to get out of their glass boxes and start being more accepting of people”.* Factor 4 agreed that a wider representation of body types would improve their use of social media with factor 3 valuing a feature where one would know when images had been digitally altered. In terms of applying this it could be that apps such as Instagram and Snapchat install a setting within the apps that allows people to be notified if pictures have been digitally altered, and that this setting could be turned on and off as the user wishes. This would link in with media campaigns such as those highlighted by Hunter (2018) and Friedman (2018) regarding the airbrushing of beauty images to unachievable standards, in which several companies such as ASOS, Dove, Missguided and H&M, are now rejecting photo shopped ‘perfection’ in favour of ‘real beauty’. Alongside this a number of celebrities, such as Jameela Jamil, Helen Mirren and Kate Winslet, are rejecting the airbrushing of images of themselves in favour of portraying their ‘natural beauty’. It is clear from this research and existing literature that, if apps were to implement a feature in which it was apparent that images had been digitally altered, individual preferences should be taken into account, as participant 6 points out *“people should be allowed to alter images if they like”.*

In considering previous research, Burnette et al., (2017) perhaps provide a starting point in highlighting that the curriculum needs to include social media literacy, acceptance of self, self-confidence, and respecting your body.

### 6.3.4. What do the extracted viewpoints tell us about social media and addiction?

Analysis of the data elicited that a holder of a factor 5 viewpoint felt the most strongly that social media is addictive and wastes time, a quote that emphasised this point the most is from participant 22 who stated *“…with how much social media we have it can get really addictive, and we always want to be on it”*. These participants also indicated that they can spend over eight hours per day on social media. This viewpoint supports existing literature that also found that adolescents using social media could be at risk of developing addictive behaviours (O’Reilly et al., 2018; Kuss & Griffiths, 2011 & 2017; Settanni et al., 2018). Previous research suggests that FOMO, smartphone addiction, perceived academic competence, and the ability to self-regulate social behaviour under pressure are all predictors of social media addiction. However, participants from factor 5, did not feel that social media was important to them in terms of seeing what people were up to, indicating that FOMO may not be something that they experience.

These contradictory findings suggest that although social media can cause addictive patterns of behaviour, the underlying cause of the addiction may not be centred on FOMO. Participants from factor 5 also noted that, although they found social media to be a waste of time and addictive, it would not be beneficial for time limits and pop up heavy usage warnings to be implemented.

Participants within factor 4 shared a similar view that using social media is addictive, also expressing that it can control their lives and make them lazy, which also lends support to some previous research. These participants indicated the second highest number of hours spent on social media per day, behind that of factor 5.

Interestingly, in contrast to the above research and findings from this study, participants from factor 2 hold a strong view that social media is not addictive, does not control their lives and is not a waste of time. In the post sort questionnaire, they identified connecting with friends as one of their main uses of social media and that it is important for them to see what people are up to. This suggests that these participants may experience FOMO and are at risk of social media addiction, however there may be other protective factors preventing this from happening, which are not yet clear.

#### 6.3.4.1. What can be done to support addictive behaviour related to social media use?

Previous research has suggested assessing users for smartphone addiction and levels of FOMO, alongside teaching adolescents how to regulate their social behaviour under pressure, and mindfulness as strategies to support social media addiction (Kuss & Griffiths, 2011 & 2017; Settanni et al., 2018; Apaolaza et al., 2019). Participants from factor 4 suggested that apps that had a pop up heavy usage warning and maximum time usage may improve their social media experiences. Interestingly participants from factor 5 disagreed with this, although they did agree that it wastes their time.

These findings suggest that further research needs to take place in supporting individuals who are displaying symptoms of addiction in relation to using social media, in particular looking at what we can learn from those social media users that should be at risk of social media addiction, yet are not experiencing it and seeing what can be learned from their social media use.

As with social media and body image, teaching social media literacy may be a good place to start.

### 6.3.5. What do the extracted viewpoints tell us about the impact of social media use on their relationships?

A common use for social media that came through from participants in the initial information sheet (appendix g) and as a theme in Factors 1, 2 and 4, was that of using social media to connect with friends and family on a daily basis. This lends itself well to support the argument made by Griffiths (2018), that human beings are ‘social animals’ and as such most individuals want to be connected with other like-minded individuals. Social media platforms provide the medium for adolescents to connect in an instantaneous way, forming a key ingredient in repetitive usage.

Factor 3, whose main viewpoint centred on the impact social media has on relationships, indicates that cyber bullying is the main issue to arise from using social media to connect with others, regardless of whether they know them or not *“…people can bully people very easily as it can be anonymous”* (participant 12). This lends support for the argument that Wint (2013) put forward, as discussed in the literature review, that social media does increase incidences of adolescents feeling concerned about cyber bullying, with worry about this continuing in their offline worlds. However, as Wint established, what bothers people on Facebook varies between individuals and across groups of individuals. Factor 3’s viewpoint also felt that social media makes it easier for arguments to escalate quickly and creates unnecessary drama amongst friends (16; +5; 21; +4) *“…it causes unwanted drama, stress and anxiety”*. As Weinstein (2018) further highlighted, teens also reported feelings of anxiety across social media platforms relating to miscommunication based conflicts and on-going concerns about how others interpret networked interactions.

However, when looking at the viewpoint elicited from factor 2, it is clear for this group that connecting with their friends has the most positive impact on their relationships with others. Although participants made comments such as *“If I argue with a friend online I will stress about it all night and be worried to go on my phone”* (participant 25), and, *“If you see all of your friends out together and they didn’t ask you it can make you feel annoyed and upset at them”* (participant 32). They ranked statements such as 04 – stops you spending face to face time with people who matter (-5) and 16 – can cause arguments to escalate quickly (0) as less important than other Factors. From this viewpoint we could make the assumption that the more social media is used for connecting with others, the more positive the impact this has on their relationships. This evidence supports more recent research conducted by Lombardi et al. (2019), who found that adolescents with a stronger sense of social connectedness were less likely to display depressive symptoms. This appears to contrast slightly with earlier research highlighted within the literature review (Radovic et al., 2017; Moreno & Kolb, 2012; Griffiths, 2018), which suggested that connection with others (alongside other variables) can exacerbate depressive symptoms.

Weinstein’s (2018) argument that teens value social media as a way to feel and remain connected with their peers and that it can provide a positive element to supporting these relationships to develop effectively due to their constant availability is associated with the viewpoint emerging from Factor 4, which suggests that social media use has a positive impact on their relationships with others.

As Nesi et al. (2018) argued, due to the increased use in social media and the influence that this has on adolescents’ interactions with their peers, relationships amongst adolescents are transforming. The current study supports the notion that not all adolescents are able to use social media to effectively support their relationships yet; however it is possible that this can happen.

#### 6.3.5.1. What can be done to support adolescent relationships on social media?

An analysis of the “would be better if” statements across factors elicited differing views on what would improve experiences where relationships had been negatively impacted by using social media. For Factors 1 and 5 it was important to them that online bullying was easier to report, with a clear outcome for those reported for bullying, i.e. a time limited ban. However, Factor 2 agreed less with this notion, in fact for them it was not as important that those doing or saying mean things got a time limited ban (47; 0). For those participants holding Factor 3 and 4 viewpoints, although clear that using social media impacts on their relationships, they did not place a high value on statements that improved this situation, indicating that they may not know what would help to improve their online relationships should they be negatively impacted. Implications from this highlight that further research needs to take place with adolescents to establish how to minimise the impact of social media on relationships, and how they should be supported if they are finding that using social media is impacting negatively on their relationships.

Interestingly with participants within Factor 3 spending up to eight hours per day using social media, and those within Factor 2 spending up to six hours, it could be assumed that the amount of time spent on social media also impacts on relationships, and carefully planned support for adolescents who share a factor 3 viewpoint, and spend up to eight hours per day using social media, to decrease their social media use could reduce the negative impact. This lends itself well to the argument proposed by Shensa et al. (2017) that devoting an excessive amount of time to social media use can impair interpersonal relationships.

### 6.3.6. What do the extracted viewpoints tell us about the moderation of social media content?

As discussed in the literature review, research regarding the moderation of social media content and the impact that this can have on wellbeing is limited, although it is clear from the literature and mainstream media, that there is a call for action.

When analysing the data in this study it was clear when looking at the responses within factor 5 that they hold a strong view about the moderation of social media content. There is a sense when looking at this factor viewpoint that these participants feel that more needs to be done to police social media and protect its users. These participants felt strongly that safety features such as being able to block people; apps having the highest security settings in place; and how to use social media safely should be taught in school. These participants also feel strongly that there should be consequences for users who are reported for inappropriate behaviour and that images should be censored if they are inappropriate for users to view.

Over any other factor, participants in factor 5 also expressed concerns regarding the ease of sending nude images over social media apps and felt that indecent images should be censored. Although briefly mentioned in the literature review, research into the impact of sending and receiving nude images via social media appears limited to statistics (Lenhart, 2009) and does not appear to go beyond this. Findings from this study indicated that it could become a problem for adolescents with participant 4 stating *“so many people get exposed through it and it can have a negative effect”.*

When taking a holistic view of the factors it was clear the there was a common view that safety when using social media is important, with all factors agreeing that using social media safely should be taught in school, with participants in factor 2 placing importance on being able to be tracked in a positive light *“I think it is good that you can be tracked because it lets your parents know where you are…”* (participant 16).

With the Green paper (2017) highlighting that supporting children, parents and carers to improve online safety needs to be a priority, it is clear that there is additional research to be done, and something to be considered when supporting adolescents who have expressed concerns about their safety when using social media.

#### 6.3.6.1. What can be done to support the moderation of social media content?

Wint (2013) suggested that providing young people with knowledge and skills to stay safe online and how to manage risks, could empower them to take responsibility for their online behaviour and feel confident in doing so. This could be seen to be more powerful than trying to protect children from potential online risks by restricting their internet access, which could in turn impact on their ability to manage their own safety online.

Participants across Factors 1, 3 and 5 suggested that their safety online “would be better if” you knew who you were speaking to all of the time and that apps automatically had the highest security settings in place. Participant 16’s comment regarding parents being able to track them lends support to a recent literary review by Bryant (2018), who suggested that in order to support adolescents using social media parents should be aware and monitor: privacy settings; location services, and that any content viewed is age appropriate, indicating that parents can have a greater impact on moderating their children’s social media use.

### 6.3.7. What new knowledge can be drawn from the 5 Factors?

An interesting viewpoint emerging from this data is that of participants within factor 2 and the bipolar viewpoint of the participant in factor 4, who identified social media as not being a problem at all for them and identified more positive aspects of using social media such as: using social media lifts their mood when they are feeling down; boosts their self-confidence; can be a good distraction from offline experiences; is important for connecting with friends and family; is motivating; and is entertaining. This supports similar findings from the RSPH study (2017) in relation to their participants’ views on YouTube, and Wint (2013) in terms of connectedness, with Radovic et al. (2017) also acknowledging that experiences with social media are not always negative, and in some instances have improved mental wellbeing. However, the viewpoint from factor 2 elaborates on previous research by identifying the specific experiences that makes their social media use more positive.

### 6.3.8. Summary

Initially, when looking at the existing literature, the argument that social media can negatively affect adolescent wellbeing centred on the amount of time they spend using social media platforms. However, further research and findings from this study demonstrated that the issue is far more complex than that.

Although generally in support of the existing literature in terms of the potential risks adolescents face when using social media, with negative impacts seen on self-esteem, body image, addiction, and relationships, the current research project highlighted that there are some adolescents who find using social media a positive experience. What this research project also achieved, where others have not, is an adolescent viewpoint on what would improve their experiences of social media use, providing a starting point for developing support tools.

## 6.4. Recommendations and implications for practice

After careful analysis of the viewpoints extracted from participants in this research, it is clear that at times they are contradictory in nature, factors 2 and 4 highlight this perfectly. As such, summarising findings and developing an approach to support adolescents is complex, and it is evident that a simplistic approach, such as reducing the time using social media, is not appropriate. It is reasonable to suggest, therefore, parents, educators and everyday social media users must understand and be aware of the positive and negative connotations of social media usage, in order to promote the healthy development of the youth in society. One social media site may not be harmful by itself, but the combination and prolonged use of social media can lead to harmful effects in development (Bryant, 2018). When looking at the results and the discussion above, the way to developing appropriate and supportive practice principally lies within:

* The knowledge professionals hold about the potential impact that using social media can have on mental wellbeing in adolescents (both positive and negative), and ways in which to offer support to those who are finding this impact to be negative.
* Parental awareness of the implications of using social media and how they can support/seek appropriate intervention for their children.
* Young people taking autonomy over their social media use and “curating their feed” (Brand, 2019).
* Social media platforms implementing features, such as an option to be alerted when images have been digitally altered, that will enhance young people’s experiences.

### 6.4.1. Professionals

As can be seen from the literature review, results, and discussion, there appears to be minimal advice on the way in which professionals should support young people exhibiting negative effects of social media use on their mental wellbeing.

Participants holding a factor 3 and 5 viewpoint indicated that it would be important to them that supporting professionals used social media. However, this appears to be limited to this study with minimal advice in wider literature available to professionals on *how* to support young people with social media related negative mental wellbeing.

Interestingly participants sharing the factor 3 viewpoint valued safety online and suggested that how to use social media safely should be taught in schools. This has wider implications for the curriculum, as although many schools teach “e-safety” with regards to bullying and grooming and other more generic online issues, there is limited evidence to suggest that *how* to use social media safely is taught discreetly. Specific issues could include the amount of time spent on social media, how they are using social media, what they post and view, and what to do if using social media is negatively impacting on their mental wellbeing.

To that end using the information that has been derived from this research I have developed a Social Media Support Screening Tool, based on a similar format to that of Penza-Clyve & Zeman (2002), for professionals, particularly Educational Psychologists, that may be beneficial to use with young people who are displaying negative mental wellbeing associated with social media use. This can be found in appendix s.

The idea of the Social Media Support Screening Tool is that professionals will be able to screen young people and establish easily which theme from the factor viewpoints that young person would fall into; from this I have identified a range of support strategies including signposting to additional resources where appropriate.

#### 6.4.1.1. Development of the Social Media Support Screening Tool

When reviewing the five factor viewpoints it was evident that, alongside heterogeneity, there were some common themes emerging. It was important to me as a researcher and a professional that I created something tangible from the results of this piece of research. Within my practice I had found myself drawn to the work of Penza-Clyve & Zeman (2002). I found their child and adolescent questionnaires easy to administer, insightful into the needs of the children and young people I had been working with, and more than anything useful in providing a ‘so what’ element. For example, if a child may be displaying difficulties with interpersonal relationships as highlighted by the questionnaire, Penza-Clyve & Zeman (2002) then identify a potential action following the gathering of this information.

From this I wondered if a similar format could be used to establish a ‘so what’ response in relation to the findings from this research. In order to explore this, I considered the information gathered as part of the literature review, recent developments in research, the statements currently being released by mainstream media outlets (newspapers etc.), and the themes emerging from this data as discussed as part of the discussion. It appeared that six common themes were evident across the five factor viewpoints. From this I then identified the Q set statements that I felt linked most closely to each of the identified themes, these were then placed under the most appropriate heading.

The table below indicates the themes and associated statements.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Theme** | **Statements associated with each heading (nos.)** |
| Connectedness | 14, 27, 39, 41, 48 |
| Impact on relationships | 04, 16, 21, 33 |
| Safety | 10, 24, 26, 35, 40, 41, 42, 45, 46 |
| Impact on wellbeing | 01, 05, 11, 20, 22, 23, 28, 31, 37, 44, 49 |
| Judged | 05, 07, 12 |
| Self-perception | 11, 15, 17, 29, 44 |

Table 4: Statements associated with the themes

I then took these themes and the associated statements from the Q set and placed them in a questionnaire format similar to that of Penza-Clyve & Zeman (2002). It is hoped that this can provide a starting point for professionals working with adolescents who may be experiencing negative effects of social media use on their mental health.

### 6.4.2. Parents

As highlighted within the literature review there is limited research into how parents can support young people struggling with their social media use. www.safekidssearch.com appears to be a useful website that offers a wealth of advice for parents, children and professionals, and is U.S based. However, the evidence base for the advice provided is not clear, and lends itself to a ‘top down’ adult lens on the use of social media. The UK equivalent [www.net-aware.org.uk](http://www.net-aware.org.uk) follows a similar premise; however, this does include quotes from parents and young people regarding most social media platforms.

In relation to parents supporting their children with safe social media use safekidssearch and net-aware offers a wide range of ‘articles’ that offer tips and support ideas for parents. For example, “Parent’s guide to protecting teens on social media” (safekidssearch) includes advice regarding open communication, privacy, establishing boundaries, and being aware of potential threats, which is in line with research from Bryant (2018).

Burnette, Kwitowski & Mazzeo (2017) also identified that the more parents are involved with their child’s social media use, the bigger the impact on their usage and how they engage with it. The work of Bryant et al., (2018) also highlighted specific recommendations for parents to support their child whilst using social media. However, as can be seen from this research, there was minimal discussion from the participants regarding how parents can influence the impact on social media use.

This suggests that further research with parents and adolescents needs to take place to establish a way forward for parents in order to support their children with social media use.

### 6.4.3. Young people

As discussed in the literature review O’Reilly et al. highlighted that participants directly attributed blame for the negative effects of social media use on the social media platforms. This maybe an overly simplistic view, as we can see from this study it is neither the internet nor the social media platforms that are solely to blame, but how adolescents are using them that are also impacting on their wellbeing. Which appears to be understood perfectly by participant 37 who stated, *“I am a much better person, and don’t miss out on as much now I don’t go on Instagram or Snapchat.”*

Looking at the results and discussion it would be reasonable to suggest, in line with O’Reilly et al. (2018) that adolescents should be encouraged to be autonomous when reflecting on and managing their behaviour when using social media and not see this as something that is beyond their control. In a recent twitter video (March, 2019) Russell Brand, famous comedian and author, is seen giving advice under the heading “Clean up your feed” arguing that using social media is negatively impacting our thoughts, but that equally it is our responsibility to manage how we use social media stating *“you must learn to curate your feed and monitor the amount of time you spend on social media platforms”.*

Young people sharing a factor 1 viewpoint, as discussed above, suggested that social media would be better for them if it was easier to report bullying and find support for personal issues. As discussed, these participants highly valued safety when using social media, identifying that their experiences could also be improved if they knew who they were speaking to all of the time, and if apps had the highest security settings in place when they first downloaded them. It would make sense for adolescents exhibiting this viewpoint that they receive support in understanding security settings on social media platforms and guidance on how to report online issues. Again [www.safesearchkids.com](http://www.safesearchkids.com) offers some guidance on this, however as outlined above this is a US based website and does not signpost to support within the UK. The UK equivalent [www.net-aware.org.uk](http://www.net-aware.org.uk) is primarily aimed at parents; however, there are useful links within this for young people.

In terms of wellbeing, participants sharing a factor 1 viewpoint suggested that they would like people to post more positive comments. Implications for young people are significant here, as they cannot control what other people say, so it would be reasonable to suggest that adolescents sharing this viewpoint would benefit from coping strategies for when people post negative comments.

For young people exhibiting a factor 2 viewpoint a completely different approach would be necessary as these participants did not see social media as a negative contributor to their mental wellbeing. This appeared to be due to several factors: the way in which they used social media; how long they spent on social media; and their view of social media. It would, in the first instance, seem counterproductive to offer support with social media use to anyone sharing this viewpoint displaying issues with their wellbeing as it is likely that their difficulties lay within other aspects of their lives.

Participants holding a factor 4 viewpoint, that social media is a problem for them, would likely need tailored support in order to manage these difficulties. As these participants ‘scored’ highest within the theme of judgement and self-perception, it would be reasonable to argue that they would need support to “curate their feed” and look further with them into how they use social media, including the accounts they follow on Instagram and Snapchat and what type of information they are sharing.

The viewpoints from this research and the findings from the existing literature support the notion that the way forward may be for adolescents to be actively involved in the development of programmes that recognise how to successfully navigate social media platforms minimising the impact on their wellbeing (O’Reilly et al., 2018).

### 6.4.4. Social Media Platforms

The results from this study appear to offer differing viewpoints on what social media platforms could do in order to improve social media experiences. Highlighted below are the main changes that participants identified, and which factor this viewpoint was elicited from:

* Make online bullying easier to report (F1)
* More accessible online support for personal issues (F1)
* Make it clear when an image has been digitally altered (F3)
* When an image has been digitally altered provide an option to see both images (F3)
* Ensure that the highest security settings are set as default (F3)
* Have a pop up heavy usage warning such as “you have been using Instagram for an hour, do you want to take a break” (F4)
* Ensure a wider representation of body types are on display (F4)
* When people have been reported for doing or saying something mean online enforce a time limited ban on that app (F5)
* Automatically censor grim and indecent images (F5)

It is clear from the range of factor viewpoints that not every young person’s social media experiences would be improved if all of the listed features were implemented. However, with the ever advancing technology and features within social media applications it would seem reasonable that many of the above points (c, d, f, i) could be determined through settings within the social media platform. For example, as iPhones now have an option for you to monitor your screen time and through this you can set time limits for social media use, it seems reasonable that this could be a feature within the social media platforms themselves that can be turned on and off at the users will.

Some of the suggestions could include promoted advertisements aimed at young people. As a social media user, I often notice online safety advertisements on Twitter, such as the guidance published from the NSPCC (2018) through the net-aware website, however I am yet to see a teen friendly version promoted online, and I have only seen these advertised on Twitter, which, as previous research has indicated, is the one of the least used social media platforms by adolescents.

To that end it would seem reasonable to suggest that, in collaboration with young people, a child and adolescent friendly version of the net-aware site with clear links to advice, support and guidance was available to young people, and also promoted within Instagram and Snapchat.

Furthermore, when looking at the information gathered through the post-sort questionnaire, 25 out of 37 participants felt as though social media would be better if there was a way in which they could identify users who could be suffering from Mental Health issues through what they put online and then direct them to support. Upon investigating this through searching terms such as ‘self-harm’ on social media apps, as discussed above, there are clear links to support websites. However, when on Instagram, if the search term is modified to ‘sel har’ then images relating self-harm are presented. This demonstrates that, although social media apps are aiming to offer support, there is more work to be done in order to protect young people from inappropriate images.

## 6.5. Limitations of the Q study

When discussing the findings from the research and the implications for professional practice it appeared that there were some limitations to the study.

In terms of Q methodology as a tool, it appeared fit for purpose and to answer the research questions effectively. However, as identified in chapter 3 (Methodology), with regards to the Q set is that it conflated the categories of policy, change and experience. However, as these were the themes emerging from the generation of the concourse in the school assembly, it was felt that it would have limited the range of viewpoints and not effectively answered the research questions should the Q set have been limited to one of those categories. Furthermore, through thorough checking and the pilot study it is hope that it was coherent enough to cover the broadest possible inclusion of what young people might say about this topic. On reflection, after analysing the results it may have been interesting to have statements that related to one another for experience and improvements, for example “using social media creates drama because things can be taken the wrong way” (statement 21) could have been linked with a “would be better if” statement, such as “would be better if I knew how to resolve arguments on social media”. This would provide further evidence and identified strategies for the Social Media Support Screening tool.

A further limitation of the study was that due to time constraints there was no time to return to participants to carry out focus groups. It would have been interesting, and added another layer of depth to the study, had I been able to go into school and meet with each of the participants from the factor viewpoints and discuss the Social Media Support Screening Tool and suggested strategies. It would have also been useful to discuss with participants from factor 2 what enables them to have positive experiences on social media and gain some insight into their protective factors.

An argument could be made that when discussing social media platforms, I asked participants to think of Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter and Facebook and YouTube in particular. On reflection it may have added more depth to the study had I asked the participants which social media platform they used the most as part of the information gathering stage. Knowing which social media app participants used may have helped to understand the viewpoints further, for example, if factor 2 participants predominantly used Snapchat this could allow us to explore what features Snapchat holds that reduces the impact on mental wellbeing, and would possibly have added further support for the RSPH (2017) study. In order to do this, I could have also asked participants to sort the Q set with a specific social media platform in mind each time to see whether the results would have been different if they were specifically thinking about their Instagram use or YouTube use. Nesi et al. (2018) would argue that adolescents preferred social media platforms change too rapidly, and that if I had limited it to one it may have made it difficult to capture the range of experiences and the rich data that I collected in this study. In a counter argument Voorveld et al. (2018) argues that engagement in social media platforms is context specific and unique based on the platform being used, therefore data would not have been lost through focussing on one platform.

In the future it could be viable that a follow up study takes place that compares the findings of this research with a repeated study focussing on one particular social media platform. However, it is hoped that the development of the Social Media Support Screening tool would be a less time-consuming way of teasing these possible differences out.

## 6.6. Implications for future research

Throughout the research process a number of decisions were made which shaped the study. The decision was made to use participants aged 13-16 due to limited previous research with this age range, and the age restrictions imposed by social media platforms. However, with recent studies by Ofcom suggesting that 10% of 9 year olds are registered with at least one social media platform, and a survey conducted by CBBC suggesting that 41% of 10-12 year olds in the UK have an Instagram account (NSPCC, 2019), further research could include younger children. Furthermore, when looking at adolescent development, it is possible that younger children may be more vulnerable to the potential risks that using social media may have on their mental health and they may provide a differing insight into how this impacts on their wellbeing. In addition, a comparative study looking at the views of young people and that of parents and school staff may be worthwhile in gaining a deeper insight into their knowledge of the potential risks and benefits that using social media has on the mental health of adolescents.

It would also prove useful to carry out an evaluative study into the Social Media Support Screening Tool created as part of this project. This could establish whether the tool is useful in identifying underlying issues relating to social media use and whether the suggested support is appropriate and effective for a range of young people dependant on how they view social media.

## 6.7. Researcher reflections

During the research process there were times I found myself surprised by the findings elicited from the data, most noticeably the factor 2 viewpoint that social media is not a problem at all for them. I was excited about the implications this could have on the knowledge available about the positive impact social media can have on young people and how we can use their knowledge in the future to possibly support others. As the majority of participants indicated that they felt the Q set allowed them to express their viewpoints I felt confident that the study held some validity within the Q methodology domain. I felt that the participants gave an honest reflection of their social media usage and were passionate about the subject in discussion. I was equally impressed with the level of maturity that the participants had when they approached the Q set and how well they engaged with the process.

Most importantly, I felt as though the study has added important information about the positive impact that social media can have on adolescents, i.e. using social media can lift their mood when they are feeling down; can boost self-confidence; can be a good distraction from offline experiences; is important for connecting with friends and family; is motivating; and is entertaining. I also wanted to achieve something tangible from the research, and felt that through the development of the Social Media Support – Screening Tool I was able to offer a starting point for guidance and ways forward to supporting young people whose mental health has been negatively affected by their social media use.

## 6.8. Conclusion

The aim of the current research was to explore the impact that using social media has on adolescent mental wellbeing, and more importantly what can be done about this. Five factors were extracted which demonstrated distinct viewpoints; however, there was an acknowledgement that some similarities also existed across the factors. The findings indicate that, unlike much of the research discussed in the literature review, social media *can* have a positive impact on adolescent mental wellbeing. Equally the findings supported the previous literature in that social media has the potential to negatively impact on adolescent mental wellbeing. What this research achieved that has not yet been discussed in wider literature, is that of a possible way forward for professionals, parents, adolescents and social media platforms in order to help minimise this potential negative impact on mental wellbeing.

It is hoped that this research will prompt adolescents and those who support them to be able to navigate their way through a complex social dynamic, and that professionals may use the developed screening tool to support with this. Further research to explore this tool would be beneficial.

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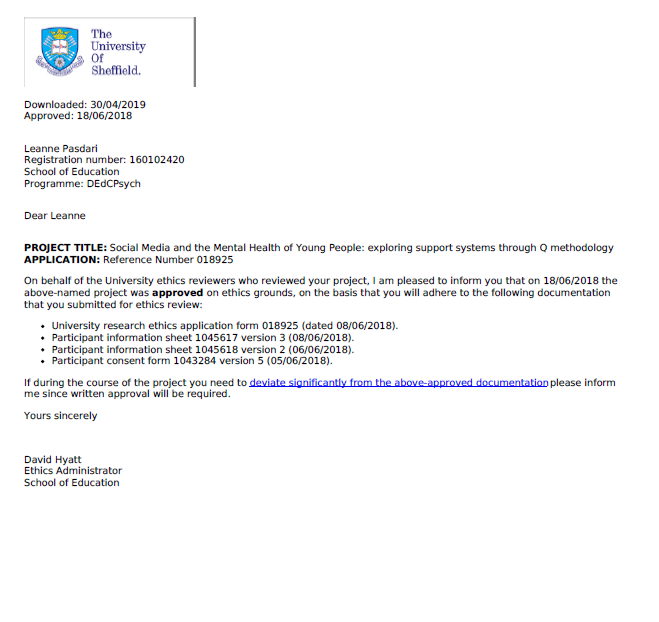
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# Appendices

## Appendix a: Ethical Approval



## Appendix b: Statements received from young people at school on 13/07/2018, collected through the assembly

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Positive statements** | **Negative statements** | **Neutral/general statements** | **Improvements/ changes** |
| 1. I like it became you can talk to people that you might not be able to see. | 1. (but) It takes us away from our friends and family | 1. I don’t use it that much. | 1. Think they would be better if all profiles were automatically private so there is a lot less risk of strangers. |
| 1. Social media is good because it is a way of communicating with friends. | 1. It creates drama and stress | 1. Nothing wrong with it. | 1. It would be better if hate comments were deleted automatically. |
| 1. Keep in contact with family and friends. | 1. Body shaming | 1. It’s positive because I use Instagram and YouTube. | 1. Better if Less Photoshop. |
| 1. Speak to friends easier. | 1. Cyber bullying | 1. I use social media for around 2-8 hours a day. I believe social media is fine as it is. Therefore, I think social media shouldn’t be changed or edited lo reduce the amount of time on these platforms. | 1. Having people monitor others profiles will NOT help (it is not needed) |
| 1. Social media is good. | 1. Bullying | 1. Use it for watching basketball on YouTube | 1. Social Media could be better if there was less bullies on it. |
| 1. It’s good because you can talk to friends outside of school. | 1. People bullying each other and being unkind | 1. I do not use Social Media since I do believe physical or face-to-face contact is more important and is treasure | 1. Social Media would be better if people weren’t tracked. |
| 1. You can talk to friends. | 1. There are chances you can get bullied on it | 1. I think if used properly it can be a good thing. I don’t think media influencers realise how much responsibility they have and don’t think about how it could affect certain people | 1. You knew who you were speaking to all of the time |
| 1. Easy communication through friends. | 1. People might not think they have a perfect life | 1. I don’t spend too much time on it so I don’t see anything wrong with it | 1. If things were censored, like grim pictures |
| 1. It allows us to communicate with friends (but). | 1. It can become an addiction | 1. I barely use SM except for group chats | 1. If it told you how long you’ve been on it |
| 1. Social Media is good because you can see what everyone is up to. | 1. It can distract you from important things | 1. I don’t get affected by any SM it’s all rubbish | 1. Maximum amount of time you can be on an app |
| 1. Can share memories with friends and family. | 1. People use it too much | 1. It’s not SM it’s the small minority that use it | 1. Tell you if pictures are photo shopped |
| 1. Social media is good because you can communicate with family and friends. | 1. Social Media drains time | 1. I use it too much but it’s addictive and I hate not having it | 1. If it showed how long you used it for |
| 1. Great method of communication | 1. It’s a place bullying takes place | 1. It affects people differently so is neither positive or negative | 1. Social Media would be better if there were people to talk to about personal issues |
| 1. You can connect with people without physically seeing them. | 1. People get bullied | 1. Gave me snapchat handle! | 1. Social Media would be better if less images were photo shopped |
| 1. I can meet new people | 1. Not feeling as confident | 1. I hardly use SM | 1. If people didn’t photo shop their images |
| 1. It’s fun | 1. It can make me sad at times when I see my friends doing something without me | 1. I don’t know | 1. If on photos you are told images are edited |
| 1. Educational | 1. SM is overused and causes anxiety but \* | 1. I see no need for change | 1. Need to limit usage |
| 1. Helps us communicate with family and friends. | 1. People can be hurtful towards your personal posts | 1. Good if private | 1. Bullying is easier to report |
| 1. Speak to friends | 1. Fake…people say unnecessary hurtful things | 1. I don’t post a lot so no one can put a bad comment about me | 1. More access to report bullying |
| 1. Get nice comments on photos | 1. Higher chance of cyber bullying | 1. I like watching YouTube | 1. If it has been edited notice |
| 1. Follow inspirational people | 1. It portrays a negative body to girls because of photoshop | 1. SM is good for Facebook | 1. Do not use it |
| 1. Speak to your friends | 1. Jealous | 1. YouTube | 1. Let people know the time they are on social media |
| 1. Talk to friends | 1. Self confidence | 1. Send funny memes | 1. Social Media would be better if there was a restriction on certain images and words |
| 1. Talk to friends | 1. annoying | 1. YouTube to watch memes | 1. Remove digital filters r give us the option of seeing without it |
| 1. Gives me something to do and doesn’t negatively affect me | 1. Too much cyberbullying | 1. Whatsapp | 1. Many Social Medias need to keep a closer eye on bullying |
| 1. It is entertaining | 1. Someone can block you | 1. Watch memes | 1. If anyone says something mean they get a 1 day ban |
| 1. Helps you connect | 1. Can be negative if you send nudes | 1. Direct Message (DM) | 1. Bullying would stop |
| 1. Informative | 1. Some things on it | 1. Post photos | 1. People should be tracking painful and mean comments |
| 1. Make new friends | 1. Lots of people put depressing quotes on their snapchat all the time and it’s very annoying | 1. Talk with friends | 1. If you knew what was edited or fake in a post |
| 1. Able to communicate with friends | 1. Bad as you waste hours on it and most is bad | 1. Memes on Snapchat | 1. If people knew it was fake |
| 1. Memes | 1. Can be very controlling and it becomes a priority, which it shouldn’t | 1. I rarely use it for images. I use online chats for up to 3 hours sometimes | 1. If they had certain filters that control bullying etc. easier |
| 1. Social Media enables good and effective communication between people around the world | 1. Cyberbullying |  | 1. Use less photoshop or filters |
| 1. It inspires people | 1. Used too much |  | 1. Stricter rules on cyber bullying |
| 1. People connect easier | 1. May not be who you think it is |  | 1. If it wasn’t used for bullying |
| 1. Can be humorous and cheer you up | 1. Cyberbullying through snapchat |  | 1. If we knew what was photoshopped |
| 1. Can be educational, e.g. documentaries on YouTube | 1. It makes people feel bad about themselves |  | 1. Monitoring pages by a server |
| 1. People are connected | 1. You need Wi-Fi |  | 1. If there were no filters so photos we see are representing what people are really like, not fake |
| 1. Makes you interact with your friends | 1. Photoshop pressures us to be something we are not |  | 1. No photoshop |
| 1. It’s good because you can socialise | 1. As someone with anxiety SM isn’t great. SM is corrupting our society, making it have a negative impact on our mentality and acceptance of people. It is horrific and it needs to stop. |  | 1. No filters |
| 1. Interact with friends | 1. Compare yourself to others |  | 1. If there was a filtering system with posts to stop bullying |
| 1. It allows communication with friends and family | 1. Compare yourself to others |  | 1. If more people could connect with you |
| 1. You can communicate to far away relative and families | 1. Get cyberbullied |  | 1. A little sign to indicate that an image has been airbrushed |
| 1. I use Social Media to speak to family and friends | 1. Leads to low self esteem |  | 1. It would be better if you could get rid of bullies |
| 1. Social Media is fun to use | 1. Could get tracked down by anyone |  | 1. Make it safer |
| 1. My Social Medias are very shielded I use Facebook and Amino where we have a safe communities | 1. Become lazy |  | 1. If there were more bigger people than skinny |
| 1. You can talk to others | 1. If you don’t share the same opinions as others you can become isolated |  | 1. Less negativity |
| 1. Memes | 1. SM is bad due to the pressure on girls and boys to look a set way just to be considered good looking |  | 1. More consequences for cyberbullying |
| 1. You can talk to friends | 1. Makes it easy for people to say nasty things |  | 1. Stopping negative comments wrote |
| 1. Find things and news in the world | 1. Seeing unrealistic expectations make you feel not good enough |  | 1. People not to start drama on SM and say it in person |
| 1. You can talk with family and friends that don’t live close to you | 1. Bullying is easy |  | 1. Better if discrimination on SM was solved |
| 1. I like how you can instantly just chat with your friends | 1. Cameras everywhere |  | 1. Mods who measure appropriate language |
| 1. You can speak to family all around the world | 1. Most of SM is fake, it is rare to find something genuine |  | 1. If you weren’t allowed to post phtoshopped images |
| 1. I make videos on YouTube and have the ability to interact with friends | 1. Potential bullying |  | 1. Not using airbrushing on pictures so that people feel more confident |
| 1. I use Social media to connect with friends and check recent news on what I like | 1. Arguments escalate |  |  |
| 1. I can speak to distant family | 1. Can be addictive |  |  |
| 1. Look a memes | 1. People can get obsessed with looking like others |  |  |
| 1. Helps me get new friends | 1. Feeling judged by others |  |  |
| 1. Connects people | 1. Comparing yourself to others |  |  |
| 1. Connects people, I Love it | 1. Procrastination and spending more time falling down a never ending rabbit hole of tweets, selfies and stories and not doing work |  |  |
| 1. Snapchat connects us together | 1. Fake |  |  |
| 1. SM helps people to communicate with friends and family | 1. Fake, can put you down |  |  |
| 1. \* You can watch good and entertaining videos | 1. Express negative views |  |  |
| 1. Interact with friends | 1. Can be bullied |  |  |
| 1. interact with friends | 1. Some photos of models and celebrities that are really thin |  |  |
| 1. Better communication with friends | 1. Get bullied |  |  |
| 1. Entertaining and can be used as inspiration | 1. Stop spending time with family and friends |  |  |
| 1. It helps with education and I can communicate with friends | 1. People feel pressured to look nice |  |  |
| 1. You can speak to people | 1. Jealous of what others do and receive |  |  |
| 1. Lets people interact with each other | 1. Some things on Instagram are trying to help mental health issues but can make you feel more down |  |  |
| 1. You can talk to people | 1. People want to be perfect on SM so edit or not post themselves |  |  |
| 1. You can talk to family in other countries |  |  |  |
| 1. Chat with friends |  |  |  |
| 1. Watch videos |  |  |  |
| 1. Find out what’s happening in the world |  |  |  |
| 1. Talk to friends |  |  |  |
| 1. Get positive feedback on your posts |  |  |  |
| 1. Speak to people |  |  |  |
| 1. Chat to people |  |  |  |
| 1. Chat with friends |  |  |  |
| 1. Check what’s new in the world |  |  |  |
| 1. Chat with friends |  |  |  |
| 1. A good way to see other people’s lifestyles |  |  |  |
| 1. Can connect with people |  |  |  |
| 1. Easier to talk to people |  |  |  |
| 1. Motivation to see what others are doing |  |  |  |
| 1. Easier to speak to people |  |  |  |
| 1. It’s fun |  |  |  |
| 1. You can talk to friends |  |  |  |
| 1. Communicate easier |  |  |  |
| 1. It’s great to socialise |  |  |  |
| 1. A way to contact people easily |  |  |  |
| 1. I can talk with my friends on it |  |  |  |
| 1. Talk to friends |  |  |  |
| 1. You can talk to friends even though you’re not with them |  |  |  |
| 1. Talk to friends and family |  |  |  |
| 1. Good because of group chats |  |  |  |
| 1. Get to see what people are up to |  |  |  |
| 1. Get to see what people are up to |  |  |  |
| 1. Allows you to see what people are up to |  |  |  |
| 1. Allows you to connect with people |  |  |  |
| 1. Allows us to interact with friends |  |  |  |
| 1. Connect with friends |  |  |  |
| 1. Can talk to friends |  |  |  |
| 1. Can communicate |  |  |  |
| 1. Can talk to friends |  |  |  |
| 1. Helps you communicate with people |  |  |  |
| 1. Helps people to stay in touch with people they don’t see often |  |  |  |
| 1. Make friends |  |  |  |
| 1. SM impacts my life by helping me keep up with things I like, e.g. bands. They make me happy so having SM lets me be close to them |  |  |  |
| 1. Communicate with others |  |  |  |
| 1. Make new friends |  |  |  |
| 1. You can share posts that you like |  |  |  |
| 1. You can socialise |  |  |  |
| 1. Talk to friends |  |  |  |
| 1. You can talk to other people online |  |  |  |
| 1. Get to speak to people outside of school |  |  |  |
| 1. You can connect with others all over the country/in other countries |  |  |  |
| 1. Send messages for free |  |  |  |
| 1. Amazing |  |  |  |
| 1. Good way to communicate |  |  |  |
| 1. It’s free |  |  |  |
| 1. It offers a much needed escape for children |  |  |  |
| 1. It’s a distraction from reality, it’s good for temporarily taking away the pain of everyday |  |  |  |
| 1. Allows me to communicate with my friends |  |  |  |
| 1. Talk to my friends |  |  |  |
| 1. Helps you speak to people outside of school |  |  |  |
| 1. It can teach kids new things and inspire them to work hard |  |  |  |
| 1. You can speak to people |  |  |  |
| 1. Communicate through SM |  |  |  |
| 1. It’s entertaining |  |  |  |
| 1. Can communicate through it |  |  |  |
| 1. Communicating |  |  |  |
| 1. You can speak to your friends and family |  |  |  |
| 1. You can message people |  |  |  |
| 1. Memes |  |  |  |
| 1. You can communicate |  |  |  |
| 1. You can communicate |  |  |  |
| 1. Helps with learning |  |  |  |
| 1. Helps connect with friends |  |  |  |
| 1. Helps you connect with friends |  |  |  |
| 1. It shows you people who feel the same way about something e.g. football |  |  |  |
| 1. Talk to friends |  |  |  |
| 1. It can help you socialise with others |  |  |  |
| 1. Can talk to friends |  |  |  |
| 1. Makes you see what is happening in the world |  |  |  |
| 1. Communicating with friends that don’t live close to you |  |  |  |
| 1. YouTube is interesting and cures my boredom |  |  |  |
| 1. Helps me talk to friends and contact people |  |  |  |
| 1. Can speak to your friends |  |  |  |
| 1. Can make new friends |  |  |  |
| 1. Communication with people |  |  |  |
| 1. You can talk to each other |  |  |  |
| 1. Helps you stay connected to everyone |  |  |  |
| 1. Can speak to friends |  |  |  |
| 1. I can see what friends are doing who I do not regularly see. |  |  |  |
| 1. Can talk to people on the other side of the world |  |  |  |
| 1. Easy access to speaking with friends |  |  |  |
| 1. Can speak to your friends anywhere |  |  |  |
| 1. Communication |  |  |  |
| 1. Allows me to communicate with friends and family around the world |  |  |  |
| 1. Keeps you in contact with friends |  |  |  |
| 1. Just a way to talk to friends |  |  |  |
| 1. Good to communicate |  |  |  |
| 1. Talk to people |  |  |  |
| 1. Communicate with friends and family |  |  |  |
| 1. Contact friends easily |  |  |  |
| 1. Make new friends |  |  |  |
| 1. Communicate |  |  |  |
| 1. Shows what you or your family members are doing while you are far apart |  |  |  |
| 1. Great way to stay connected with friends |  |  |  |
| 1. Keep in touch with friends and family |  |  |  |
| 1. You can connect with people |  |  |  |
| 1. Can talk to people |  |  |  |
| 1. Can speak to friends/communicate |  |  |  |
| 1. Can speak to friends/communicate |  |  |  |
| 1. Can speak to friends/communicate |  |  |  |
| 1. Can speak to friends/communicate |  |  |  |
| 1. Can speak to friends/communicate |  |  |  |
| 1. Can speak to friends/communicate |  |  |  |
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| 1. Can speak to friends/communicate |  |  |  |
| 1. Can speak to friends/communicate |  |  |  |
| 1. Can speak to friends/communicate |  |  |  |
| 1. Can speak to friends/communicate |  |  |  |
| 1. Messages |  |  |  |
| 1. News |  |  |  |
| 1. Fun |  |  |  |
| 1. People can express themselves |  |  |  |
| 1. Can teach us things |  |  |  |
| 1. Enjoyable to watch gaming videos on YouTube |  |  |  |
| 1. Like to watch people play a game (Twitch) |  |  |  |
| 1. Can see what people are up to |  |  |  |

## Appendix c: Final Q-Set

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Lifts my mood when I’m feeling down | is addictive |
| would be better if there was a pop up heavy usage warning e.g. “you have used SM for x hours, why not take a break?” | stops you spending face to face time with people who matter |
| makes me feel good when people like the things I post (images/comments/status’) | teaches me new things |
| makes me feel judged | inspires me to work hard |
| would be better if it was clear when images had been digitally altered | safety should be taught in school |
| Boosts my self confidence | is upsetting because it puts pressure on me to look a certain way |
| would be better if professionals supporting young people with any social media related issues use social media themselves | is important to me because I can see what people are up to |
| makes me feel positive about my body image | can cause arguments to escalate quickly |
| allows me to express my ‘true’ self | would be better, when an image had been altered, if there was an option to see both the altered and not altered image |
| is too easy to send nudes | stops me getting bored |
| creates drama because things can be taken the wrong way | can control my life |
| is not a problem at all for me | should automatically have the highest security settings in place |
| helps me with learning | would be better if there was no way to be tracked, e.g. the location tracking on Snapchat |
| is important because I can keep in touch with friends | makes me feel good |
| would be better if there was a wider representation of male and female body shapes | can make me lazy |
| can be a good distraction from offline experiences, e.g. exam stress, bereavement | would be better if apps had a maximum time usage on them |
| makes it easier to get bullied | motivates me |
| would be better if language was censored depending on the age of the user | would be better if it was easier to report bullying |
| would be better if people posted more positive comments | wastes a lot of time |
| is important because I can keep in touch with family | is annoying because people can block you |
| would be better if you knew who you were speaking to all of the time | would be better if it was easier to find support for personal issues |
| is entertaining | is upsetting because I compare my life to other people’s lives |
| would be better if all indecent images were censored | would be better if grim (violent/gory) images were censored |
| would be better if people who are reported for saying or doing mean things got a time limited ban depending on what they had done | is important to me because you can send messages for free |
| makes me stressed |

## Appendix d: PowerPoint delivered to school

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Slide 1 |  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ |
| Slide 2 |  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ |
| Slide 3 |  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ |
| Slide 4 |  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ |
| Slide 5 |  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ |
| Slide 6 |  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ |
| Slide 7 |  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ |
| Slide 8 |  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ |
| Slide 9 |  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ |
| Slide 10 |  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ |
| Slide 11 |  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ |

## Appendix e: Participant information pack

(Working title)

**Social Media and the Mental Health of Young People: Exploring support systems through Q methodology**

Thank you for indicating that you would like to take part in the research project.

Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve.

Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish.

* Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.
* Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.
* If you chose to to take part in this research project please remember that if at any point you wish to withdraw from the project and your data removed from the data set please do not hesitate to contact me and let me know.

What is the project’s purpose?

Research on the impact on young people of social media use is mixed, suggesting that for some, using Social Media Sites, e.g. Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, Snapchat and Twitter can have a negative impact on the Mental Health and Wellbeing of some Young People (aged 15-20), whilst for others these and other types of social media, can be more positive.

What I want to know is:

* What are the positives and negatives for you on using social media?
* What do you think might help you to manage any negative effects of using Social Media?
* What advice would you give others whose well-being is affected by using Social Media?

What will happen?

You will be asked to rank 40-60 statements in response to your experiences of using Social Media with the scale ranging from -6 (most unlike what I think) to +6 (most like what I think). The statements will be created by asking young people (aged 13-16) how they would answer the question above, and some will come from the research I mentioned earlier. I may also ask you questions during the statement sort about your answers to find out why you have sorted them in that way.

Are there any risks associated with taking part?

As you have chosen to take part in the research, it is expected that you are currently using/used to use Social Media Sites for 3 or more hours per day and so will be discussing an aspect of your life that is part of your daily activity. However, if at any point throughout the research you start to feel any distress please let me, or Dr Fox, aware and we will make sure you receive the right support.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will help people like me have a better understanding of how to support Young People manage their Social Media use. I also hope that some of us will be able to create a digital poster together to pass on to Social Media outlets, which can help others to maintain their well-being whilst using Social Media.

What if something goes wrong?

It is unlikely that anything will go wrong in this research project. However, should you feel uncomfortable with any aspect of the project or my treatment of you then you can contact Dr Martin Hughes at the University of Sheffield ([m.hughes@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:m.hughes@sheffield.ac.uk)).

Should you feel your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction you can contact the Head of Department (Antony Williams [a.williams@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:a.williams@sheffield.ac.uk)) who will then escalate the complaint through the appropriate channels.

Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

All the information that I collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications. Neither will your school or specific location.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

The results of the research project will be collated and analysed. These will then be published as part of my Doctoral Thesis. In the future I would like to get the information published into the wider Educational Psychology domain.

Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been ethically approved via the School of Education and the University of Sheffield department’s ethics review procedure.

Contact for further information

Please contact the following people for more information if required:

Researcher:

Leanne Pasdari

[lspasdari1@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:lspasdari1@sheffield.ac.uk)

Research supervisor:

Dr Martin Hughes

[m.hughes@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:m.hughes@sheffield.ac.uk)

Please retain a copy of this information sheet and the attached consent forms for your information.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this Research Project!

**Social Media and the Mental Health of Young People: Exploring support systems through Q methodology**

Dear Parent/Carer,

Your child has indicated that they would like to take part in the above research project.

Before you decide on whether to consent to their involvement it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve.

Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish.

* Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.
* Take time to decide whether or not you wish for your child to take part.
* If you chose to allow your child to take part in this research project please remember that if at any point they wish to withdraw from the project and their data removed from the data set please do not hesitate to contact me and let me know.

What is the project’s purpose?

According to some research, whilst this is not the case for everyone, using Social Media Sites, e.g. Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat and Twitter can have a negative impact on the Mental Health and Wellbeing of some Young People (aged 15-20).

What I want to know is:

* What do young people do to manage the impact of Social Media on their Mental Health?
* What do young people think might help them to manage their Mental Health whilst using Social Media?
* What advice would young people give others who’s Mental Health is affected by using Social Media?

What will happen?

Your child will be asked to rank 40-60 statements in response to the question “My use of social media would be more positive if it was…” with the scale ranging from -6 (most unlike what I think) to +6 (most like what I think). The statements will be created by asking young people (aged 13-16) how they would answer the question and some will come from the research I mentioned earlier. I may also ask your child questions during the statement sort about their answers to find out why you have sorted them in that way.

Are there any risks associated with taking part?

As your child have chosen to take part in the research, it is expected that they are currently using/used to use Social Media Sites (YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter) for 3 or more hours per day and so will be discussing an aspect of their life that is part of their daily activity. However, if at any point throughout the research your child indicates any distress please let me, or Dr Fox, aware and we will make sure you and your child receive the right support.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will help people like me have a better understanding of how to support Young People manage their Social Media use. I also hope that some of the participants and I will be able to create a digital poster together to pass on to Social Media outlets, which can help others to manage their Mental Health whilst using Social Media.

What if something goes wrong?

It is unlikely that anything will go wrong in this research project. However, should you feel uncomfortable with any aspect of the project or my treatment of your child then you can contact Dr Martin Hughes at the University of Sheffield ([m.hughes@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:m.hughes@sheffield.ac.uk)).

Should you feel your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction you can contact the Head of Department (Antony Williams [a.williams@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:a.williams@sheffield.ac.uk)) who will then escalate the complaint through the appropriate channels.

Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

All the information that I collect about your child during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. Your child will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications. Neither will your school or specific location.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

The results of the research project will be collated and analysed. These will then be published as part of my Doctoral Thesis. In the future I would like to get the information published into the wider Educational Psychology domain.

Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been ethically approved via the School of Education at the University of Sheffield department’s ethics review procedure.

Contact for further information

Please contact the following people for more information if required:

Researcher:

Leanne Pasdari

[lspasdari1@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:lspasdari1@sheffield.ac.uk)

Research supervisor:

Dr Martin Hughes

[m.hughes@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:m.hughes@sheffield.ac.uk)

Please retain a copy of this information sheet and the attached consent forms for your information.

Thank you in advance for agree

## Appendix f: Consent form

Social Media and the Mental Health of Young People: Exploring support systems through Q methodology

Participant Consent Form

|  |
| --- |
| Title of Research Project: Social Media and the Mental Health of Young People: exploring support systems through Q methodology.  Name of Researcher: Leanne Pasdari  Participant Identification Number for this project: **Please initial box**   1. I confirm that I have attended and understood the school assembly, workshop or accessed the intranet forum explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project. 2. I confirm that I and my parents have read the attached information sheet. 3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline. 4. I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research. 5. I agree for the anonymised data collected from me to be used in future research 6. I agree to take part in the above research project.   Name of Participant Date Signature  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  Name of Parent/Carer  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  Name of person taking consent  (*if different from lead researcher*)  *To be signed and dated in presence of the participant*  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  Lead Researcher  *To be signed and dated in presence of the participant*  Leanne Pasdari \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  **\*Please return to school as soon as possible\***  **\*\*There are limited numbers available\*\*** |

## Appendix g: Participant information form



**Social Media and the Mental Health of Young People**

**Participant Information Sheet**

Name:

Age:

Gender Identity:

Year Group:

About how much time do you spend using Social Media per day? (Please tick one)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Less than 3 |  |  | 3-4 |  |  | 5-6 |  |  | 7-8 |  |  | 8+ |  |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| What do you use Social Media for and how often? | | |
|  | Yes/No | Daily/weekly/monthly/yearly |
| to connect with friends |  |  |
| to connect with family |  |  |
| to connect with others |  |  |
| to follow inspirational people |  |  |
| to create memes |  |  |
| to find memes |  |  |
| to send memes |  |  |
| to make YouTube videos |  |  |
| to keep updated on my interests |  |  |
| to make new friends |  |  |
| Other (please list as many as you want) | | |

Participant code:

## Appendix h: Verbal instructions

**Social Media and the Mental Health of Young People**

**Verbal Instructions**

* Lay out the long strip which numbers each of the columns. This will help you to remember how many statements should go in each column and which way to place the statements (‘Most Disagree’ on the far left - ‘Most Agree’ on the far right).
* Put the sentence starter where you can keep looking at it throughout the activity if you need to “Using Social Media…”
* Read through each of the 5 statements and sort them into three piles:
  + On the right – those which you agree with
  + On the left – those you disagree with or agree with much less
  + In the middle – those you have no strong feeling about
* From the pile on the right, choose one statement which is most like your view and put it in the far right column
* From the pile on the left, choose one statement which is least like your view and put it in the far left column.
* Back to the pile on the right; choose two statements which are more like your view than the others in the pile but not as much your view as the one you have already chosen. Put them in the second column from the right. Move statements around if you change your mind.
* From the pile on the left; choose two statements to place in the second column from the left.
* Keep doing this, working your way towards the middle with the statements you have left over.
* Check that you are happy with your arrangement and make any changes needed to make sure that the sort fits your view.
* Complete the ‘Post-sort Questionnaire; try to answer the questions as honestly as possible

## Appendix i: Q sort sorting strip

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Most disagree  -6 | -5 | -4 | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Most agree  6 |
| **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** | **6** | **7** | **6** | **5** | **4** | **3** | **2** | **1** |

## Appendix j: Post sort questionnaire



**Social Media and the Mental Health of Young People**

**Post Sort Questionnaire**

1. Have a look at the statements you have just sorted. If you feel that you are able to, please draw a line on the grid to separate the statements that you agree with from those you do not agree with.
2. Please write down any statements which you feel were missing from the cards (they do not have to represent your view):
3. Do you think that the way that you finally arranged the cards allowed you to give your view?

**YES/NO** (please circle)

If no, please explain why:

1. Look at the cards you have sorted to the extreme left and to the extreme right. These are answers that you have felt most strongly about. What do you think makes these statements so important to you?
2. Are there any other cards that have stood out to you? This may be because it did not make sense to you or because you felt it should not belong in the card sort. Please state which card and why:
3. Do you think Social Media would be better if there was a way that platforms could identify users who could be suffering from Mental Health issues through what they put online and then direct them to support?
4. Do you think that using Social Media negatively impacts on your well-being? Why?

Thank you!

Leanne

(Wint, 2013)

## Appendix k: Debrief sheet

**Social Media and Mental Health in Young People Research**

**Debrief Sheet**

* If you have had a negative experience when using social media, it is important that you tell someone. For help and advice on how to respond to negative communication, the following contacts may be useful:

[www.childline.org](http://www.childline.org)

[www.safesearchkids.com](http://www.safesearchkids.com)

[www.net-aware.org.uk](http://www.net-aware.org.uk)

* A helpline you can call to discuss your concerns

0800 1111 Childline

If you want to talk to me again about any aspect of the research or concerns that you may have, I can be contacted on lspasdari1@sheffield.ac.uk although if I feel that you or someone you know is in danger, I will not be able to promise you that I will keep what you say a secret. I would have to talk to school and your parents/ carers.

(as developed by Wint, 2013)

## Appendix l: Factor Matrix with an X Indicating a Defining Sort

Loadings

SORT 1 2 3 4 5

1 EHY1014F 0.5170 0.4621 -0.0958 0.0239 0.0685

2 AIY1014F 0.3106 0.1346 0.7205X 0.1788 0.0407

3 ECY1014F -0.1975 0.0304 -0.0332 0.3001 0.2615

4 LNY1014F 0.3455 0.2847 0.1911 -0.0785 0.6212X

5 WHY1116M 0.2335 0.1806 0.5519X -0.0861 0.1846

6 ATY1014F 0.1370 0.7250X -0.0152 -0.0328 0.1258

7 CCY1015F 0.0026 0.3079 -0.0513 0.4241X 0.0118

8 FWY1015M -0.0136 0.6751X 0.3576 -0.0199 0.0030

9 IFY1014F -0.2793 0.7383X -0.1800 -0.1307 -0.1242

10 EWY1014F 0.0855 0.1716 -0.0617 -0.4059X 0.2948

11 KSY1014F 0.1223 -0.0998 0.0370 0.6526X 0.0154

12 TBY1014M -0.1761 0.1521 0.6132X 0.3004 0.3459

13 TGY1014M 0.3779 0.3950 0.4057 0.0030 0.2475

14 SBY1015F 0.1654 0.0427 0.3567 0.0571 0.5128X

15 SAY1014F 0.2358 0.0561 0.0541 0.3487 0.5579X

16 LBY1015F 0.2615 0.2522 0.0115 0.5030X 0.3424

17 MSY1015F -0.1327 0.6294X 0.0070 0.0240 0.2360

18 SBY1014F -0.0055 0.3148 0.2439 0.2109 0.3318

19 CSY1015M 0.1875 0.4375 0.4930 -0.2030 0.0934

20 CHY1014F 0.5058 -0.1929 0.1948 0.4595 0.2245

21 LMY1015F 0.6819X -0.1079 0.2608 0.2856 0.2154

22 JBY1015F 0.0482 0.1707 0.0754 -0.0392 0.5375X

23 CDY1015M -0.0006 0.0855 0.6041X -0.0129 -0.0100

24 LHY1116F 0.2765 -0.0600 0.4872X 0.1561 0.3244

25 CWY1115F 0.3036 0.4213X -0.0850 0.2020 0.3626

26 DEY1015F 0.3951 0.1274 0.4088 -0.0151 0.1563

27 PMY1014F 0.2104 0.6054X 0.2023 0.0389 0.2697

28 NBY1115F -0.0545 0.5582 0.4192 0.0730 0.1446

29 NRY1116M 0.2292 0.0762 0.0458 0.0813 0.3894X

30 SSY1116M 0.5102X -0.1013 0.0780 0.0275 0.1376

31 MBY1014F 0.1532 0.3375 0.4172X 0.2557 0.0883

32 AEY1116F 0.0391 0.7912X -0.0357 -0.1103 0.1149

33 IBY1015F 0.0686 -0.2769 0.0022 0.4092X 0.1071

34 KMY1015M -0.0646 0.6304X 0.3372 -0.1021 -0.1279

35 KDY1015F 0.1142 0.2297 0.2787 0.5460 0.4618

36 AHY1014F 0.4626 -0.1596 0.2898 0.6151 0.2539

37 IWY1014M 0.4669X 0.1548 0.1566 0.0105 0.2015

## Appendix m: Q-sort distribution grid

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Disagree with the most | | | | | | Agree with the most | | | | | | | |
| -6 | -5 | -4 | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | +1 | +2 | +3 | +4 | +5 | | +6 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | |  |
| (1) |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | | (1) |
|  | (2) |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | (2) |
|  |  | (3) |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | (3) |  |
|  |  |  | (4) |  |  |  |  |  | (4) |  |  |
|  |  |  |  | (5) |  |  |  | (5) |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  | (6) |  | (6) |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  | (7) |  |  |  |  |  |

## Appendix n: Factor Interpretation Crib Sheet for Factor 1

**Items ranked at +6**

26 Would be better if there was no way to be tracked

**Items Ranked higher in Factor 1 Array than in Other Factor Arrays**

24 Should automatically have the highest security setting +5

37 Would be better if people posted more positive comments +4

41 Would be better if you knew who you were speaking to all of the time +2

44 Is upsetting because I compare my life to other people’s lives +5

**Items Ranked Lower in Factor 1 Array than in Other Factor Arrays**

01 Lifts my mood when I am feeling down -4

15 Makes me feel positive about my body image -5

28 Makes me feel good -4

31 Can be a good distraction from offline experiences, e.g. bereavement -3

43 Is entertaining -2

48 Is important because you can send messages for free -2

**Items Ranked at -6**

11 Boosts my self confidence

**Ties with other Factors**

(03 -2)f3 (04 +1)f3 (05 -1)f3 ((06 -1))f3 f5 (09 -2)f4 (10 +3)f5 (11 -6)f4 (16 +1)f4 (17 -3)f3 (19 +1)f3 (21 +3)f2 (22 -4)f3 (23 -1)f3 (30 0)f3 (33 0)f4 (35 +1)f3 (36 +4)f3 (38 +2)f5 (39 +2)f5 (40 -5)f3 (42 +4)f5 ((46 0))f2 f4 ((49 -3))f2 f3

**Distinguishing Statements for F1**

26 Would be better if there was no way to be tracked +6

43 Is entertaining -2

31 Can be a good distraction from offline experiences -3

1 Lifts my mood when I am feeling down -3

## Appendix o: Factor Interpretation crib sheet for Factor 2

**Items Ranked at +6**

31 Can be a good distraction from offline experiences, e.g. bereavement, exam stress

**Items Ranked higher in Factor 2 Array than in Other Factor Arrays**

01 Lifts my mood when I am feeling down +4

06 Teaches me new things +2

11 Boosts my self-confidence +1

17 Allows me to express my true self -1

23 Is not a problem at all for me +3

25 Helps me with learning +1

28 Makes me feel good +1

34 Motivates me +3

39 Is important because I can keep in touch with family +4

43 Is entertaining +5

48 Is important because you can send messages for free +3

**Items Ranked lower in Factor 2 Array than any other Factor Arrays**

02 Is addictive -2

03 Would be better if there was a pop up heavy usage warning -2

07 Makes me feel judged -4

09 Would be better if it was clear when images had been digitally altered -3

13 Would be better if professionals supporting used social media -2

16 Can cause arguments to escalate quickly 0

18 Would be better, when an image had been digitally altered, if there was an option to see both pictures -4

38 Wastes a lot of time -2

41 Would be better if you knew who you were speaking to all of the time -2

47 Would be better if people who were reported for saying/doing mean things got a time limited ban 0

**Items ranked at – 6**

22 Can control my life

**Ties with other factors**

(04 -5)f5 (05 0)f4 (12 -3)f3 (14 0)f4 (19 +2)f4 (20 +4)f4 (21 +3)f1 (24 0)f5 (29 +2)f5 (30 -1)f5 (35 -1)f5 (36 0)f3 (37 +1)f3 (44 -5)f3 (45 -1)f4 ((46 0))f1 f3 ((49 -3))f1 f3

**Distinguishing Statements for F2**

31 Can be a good distraction from offline experiences, e.g. bereavement, exam stress

1 Lifts my mood when I am feeling down

23 Is not a problem for me at all

48 Is important because you can send messages for free

25 Helps me with learning

11 Boosts my self confidence

28 Makes me feel good

38 Wastes a lot of time

3 Would be better if there was a pop up heavy usage warning

7 Makes me feel judged

22 Can control my life

## Appendix p: Factor Interpretation crib sheet for Factor 3

**Items Ranked at +6**

33 Makes it easier to get bullied

**Items Ranked higher in Factor 3 Array than in Other Factor Arrays**

09 Would be better if it was clear when images had been digitally altered +1

10 Safety should be taught in school +4

13 Would be better if professionals supporting used social media +5

16 Can cause arguments to escalate quickly +5

18 would be better if, when images had been digitally altered, if there was an option to see both pictures 0

21 Creates drama because things can be taken the wrong way +4

**Items Ranked lower in Factor 3 Array than any other Factor Arrays**

29 Would be better if there was a wider representation of body types -2

34 Motivates me -4

39 Is important because I can keep in touch with family -1

**Items ranked at – 6**

08 Inspires me to work hard

**Ties with other factors**

(03; +2)f1 (04; +1)f1 (5; -1)f1 ((6; -1))f1 f5 (7; +3)f4 (11; -3)f5 (12; -3)f2 (14; -4)f5 (17; -3)f1 (19; +1)f1 (22; -4)f1 (23; -1)f1 (31; 0)f5 (35; +1)f1 (36; 0)f2 (37; +1)f2 (38; +1)f4 (40; 0)f5 (44; -5)f2 (46; +3)f5 (48; 0)f5 ((49; -3))f1 f2

**Distinguishing statements for Factor 3**

33 Makes it easier to get bullied +6

16 Can cause arguments to escalate quickly +5

13 Would be better if professionals supporting used social media +5

20 Stops me getting bored +2

18 Would be better, when an image had been digitally altered, if there was an option to see both pictures 0

39 Is important because I can keep in touch with family -1

8 Inspires me to work hard -6

## Appendix q: Factor Interpretation crib sheet for Factor 4

**Items Ranked at +6**

27 Is important because I can keep in touch with friends

**Items Ranked higher in Factor 4 Array than in Other Factor Arrays**

03 Would be better if there was a pop up heavy usage warning +3

04 Stops you spending face to face time with people who matter +5

12 Is upsetting because it puts pressure on me to look a certain way +5

22 Can control my life +2

30 Can make me lazy +3

32 Would be better if apps had a maximum time usage on them +1

49 Makes me stressed +1

**Items Ranked lower in Factor 4 Array than any other Factor Arrays**

10 Safety should be taught in school -1

17 Allows me to express my true self -5

21 Creates drama because things can be taken the wrong way 0

23 Is not a problem at all for me -5

24 Should automatically have the highest security settings in place -2

26 Would be better if there was no way to be tracked -2

36 Would be better if it was easier to report bullying -2

37 Would be better if people posted more positive comments -1

42 Would be better if it was easier to find support for personal issues -3

**Items ranked at – 6**

11 Boosts my self confidence

**Ties**

(5; 0)f2 (07; +3)f3 (14; 0)f2 (19; +2)f2 (20; +4)f2 (29; +2)f2 (45; -1)f2 ((46; 0))f1 f2

**Distinguishing statements**

4 Stops you spending face to face time with people who matter

30 Can make me lazy

22 Can control my life

49 Makes me stressed

10 Safety should be taught in school

37 Would be better if people posted more positive comments

26 Would be better if there was no way to be tracked

36 Would be better if it was easier to report bullying

24 Should automatically have the highest security settings in place

42 Would be better if was easier to find support for personal issues

8 Inspires me to work hard

## Appendix r: Factor Interpretation crib sheet for Factor 5

**Items Ranked at +6**

02 Is addictive

**Items Ranked higher in Factor 5 Array than in Other Factor Arrays**

08 Inspires me to work hard +2

45 Would be better if all indecent images were censored +3

47 Would be better if people who were reported for saying/doing mean things got a time limited ban +5

**Items Ranked lower in Factor 5 Array than any other Factor Arrays**

05 Makes me feel good when people like the things I post -3

19 Is too easy to send nudes -1

20 Stops me getting bored -2

25 Helps me with learning -4

32 Would be better if apps had a maximum time usage on them -5

**Items ranked at – 6**

40 Is annoying because people can block you

**Ties with other factors**

(4; -5)f2, (6; -1)f3, (11 -3)f3 (14; -4)f3, (15 -4)f4, (18 -3)f4, (24 0)f2, (28 -2)f3, (30; -1)f3, (31; 0)f3, (35; -1)f2, (36; +4)f1, (38; +2)f1, (39 +2)f1, (42; +4)f1, (46; +3)f3, (48 0)f3

**Distinguishing statements**

33 Makes it easier to get bullied

12 Is upsetting because it puts pressure on me to look a certain way

44 Is upsetting because I compare my life to other people’s lives

22 Can control my life

49 Makes me stressed

7 Makes me feel judged

## Appendix s: Social Media Support – Screening Tool

Name………………………………………………………………… Date…………………………………………………

Age ………………………….. Class………………………………. Gender identity ………………………………

We are going to think about our thoughts and feelings regarding using social media.

In front of you are some statements with a scale by the side. For each statement you have to decide how true that statement is about your experiences when using social media. You can choose from five different responses:

1 = not true at all, 2 = a little bit true, 3 = somewhat true, 4 = very true, 5 = extremely true

There are no right or wrong answers; you just have to draw a circle around the number that describes your experiences best. Please work on your own.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Using social media… | Not true at all | A little bit true | Somewhat true | Very true | Extremely true |
| 1. Makes me feel good when people like the things I post | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1. Is important because I can see what people are up to | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1. Lifts my mood when I am feeling down | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1. Boosts my self confidence | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1. Stops you spending time with people who matter | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1. Should automatically have the highest security settings in place | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1. Makes me feel positive about my body image | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1. Makes me feel judged | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1. Allows me to express my true self | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1. Is important because I can keep in touch with friends | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1. Can cause arguments to escalate quickly | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1. Stops me getting bored | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1. Is upsetting because it puts pressure on me to look a certain way | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1. Is upsetting because I compare my life to other people’s lives | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1. Is important because I can keep in touch with family | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1. Creates drama because things can be taken the wrong way | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1. Can control my life | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1. Is important because you can send messages for free | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1. Makes it easier to get bullied | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1. Is annoying because people can block you | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1. Is not a problem at all for me | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1. Makes me feel good | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1. Can be a good distraction from offline experiences e.g. bereavement, exam stress | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1. Makes me stressed | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1. Makes me feel positive about my body image | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

**Social Media Support Screening Tool**

**Scoring sheet**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Connectedness | | Impact on Relationships | | Safety | | Impact on wellbeing | | Judged | | Self-Perception | |
|  | |  | |  | | 1 |  | 1(R) |  |  | |
| 2 |  |  | |  | |  | |  | | | |
|  | |  | |  | | 3 |  |  | |  | |
|  | |  | |  | | 4 |  |  | |  | |
|  | | 5 |  |  | |  | |  | |  | |
|  | |  | | 6 |  |  | |  | |  | |
|  | |  | |  | |  | |  | | 7 |  |
|  | |  | |  | |  | | 8 |  |  |  |
|  | |  | |  | |  | |  | | 9 |  |
| 10 |  |  | |  | |  | |  | |  | |
|  | | 11 |  |  | |  | |  | |  | |
|  | |  | |  | | 12 |  |  | |  | |
|  | |  | |  | |  | | 13 |  |  | |
|  | |  | |  | |  | |  | | 14(R) |  |
| 15 |  |  | |  | |  | |  | |  | |
|  | | 16 |  |  | |  | |  | |  | |
|  | |  | |  | | 17(R) |  |  | |  | |
| 18 |  |  | |  | |  | |  | |  | |
|  | | 19 |  |  | |  | |  | |  | |
|  | |  | | 20(R) |  |  | |  | |  | |
|  | |  | |  | | 21 |  |  | |  | |
|  | |  | |  | | 22 |  |  | |  | |
|  | |  | |  | | 23 |  |  | |  | |
|  | |  | |  | | 24(R) |  |  | |  | |
|  | |  | |  | |  | |  | | 25 |  |
| Total |  | Total |  | Total |  | Total |  | Total |  | Total |  |
| Mean  (÷4) |  | Mean  (÷4) |  | Mean  (÷2) |  | Mean  (÷9) |  | Mean  (÷3) |  | Mean  (÷3) |  |

**(R) = Reverse score items**

**Administration**

The Social Media Support Screening Tool can be completed individually by students from age 13 upwards. It would normally be given after some general introductory explanation specifying that it is a questionnaire about their experiences of using social media. It should be explained that there are 25 statements about the person completing the questionnaire.

**Scoring**

The young person should be presented with the response form and asked to tick a box to indicate the degree to which the 25 statements presented describe their social media experiences. Responses range from “Not true at all” (score 1), to “Extremely true” (score 5). Please note that some items are reverse scored – Safety – 20, wellbeing 17 and 24, and judged – 1 – i.e. ‘Not true at all’ (score 1) should be scored as 5 and, ‘Somewhat true’ (4) scored as 2.

Scores can then be transferred into the scoring sheet provided. Item scores should be added together for each scale. The total scores can then be divided by the number of items in that scale to obtain the average score for each scale.

* Connectedness (4 items)
* Impact on relationships (4 items)
* Safety (2 items)
* Impact on wellbeing (9 items)
* Judged (3 items)
* Self-perception (3 items)

An individuals’ profile can then be viewed across different types social media related difficulties and patterns considered. It is not appropriate to create a composite score for the whole questionnaire by summing the scores on all items. This is because the individual scales are either negatively correlated or unrelated to each other.

**Interpretation**

The scales of the SMSS – T provide a profile of how using social media impacts on adolescent mental wellbeing. The instrument is not normed and so does not provide comparisons of an individual’s experiences with adolescents nationally of that age and gender. What it does do is provide a profile of the relative importance that an individual places on experiences of using social media and provide potential indicators of where young people may be experiencing social media related mental wellbeing difficulties.

For connectedness and safety higher scores reflect a higher level of importance, whereas low scores reflect a relative absence of importance. For impact on relationships and impact on wellbeing higher scores reflect a bigger impact, whereas lower scores reflect a relative absence of issue in these areas. For feeling judged higher scores reflect a higher presence of feeling judged when using social media, whereas lower scores reflect a relative absence of feeling judged online, and for self-perception lower scores reflect a lower sense of self-perception, whereas higher scores reflect a higher sense of self-perception.

If high scores are achieved in the connectedness and impact on relationships scales then pupils may benefit from:

* Discussions regarding online bullying – reporting bullying, online support networks, offline support networks.
* A discussion about what online bullying is and if they feel they are being bullied signposting for appropriate support.
* Discussions about the amount of time they are spending on social media, how they are using it to interact with their friends, is the amount of time they are on social media a problem for them, and support to reduce the time they spend on there.
* Targeted intervention/support regarding interpreting written text.
* Targeted intervention/support on how to manage online conflict with peers.

If high scores are achieved for safety, pupils may benefit from:

* Targeted support/intervention regarding keeping safe whilst using social media, signposting to the information available on [www.net-aware.org.uk](http://www.net-aware.org.uk)
* Discuss current security settings with pupils and encourage them to ensure the highest security settings are in place.
* Discuss the pupils’ social media use with parents/carers and encourage them to monitor: privacy settings; location services; and that any content viewed is age appropriate.

If high scores are achieved for the impact on wellbeing pupils may benefit from:

* Targeted intervention/support on managing stress and anxiety, such as mindfulness.
* Targeted intervention/support on self-comparison and self-depreciation.
* Targeted intervention/support to develop emotional resilience.

If high scores for feelings of being judged and low scores for self-perception are reported then pupils may benefit from:

* Targeted support and education on curating their feeds and encouragement to consider some of the following: only follow people that make you feel good (celebrities and peers) when you are looking at their posts; follow people who typically post positive comments; turn comments off their post so that they are not in receipt of negative comments; do not read the comments on other’s posts if they might be upsetting; follow a wider range of people displaying a wider range of body types.
* Targeted intervention/support to develop self-confidence and emotional resilience.
* Targeted support to educate pupils on reporting and acting on negative content, signposting to information from [www.net-aware.org.uk](http://www.net-aware.org.uk).