#Selfie

Identity online; the effects of social media design through the lens of comic books

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Abstract

Against a backdrop of young people increasingly using an array of social media platforms for a range of social activities, accessed through a variety of devices, this thesis considers the effect of these platforms upon the identity performances of young people online.

In order to do so, this thesis proposes a theoretical framework to consider the manner in which user and design enmesh to produce unique identity performances. Through the proposed Comic Book Theory, this thesis is able to consider how given identity performances are bound to the specific design of the platforms, but that the performances are also realised in a unique manner by socio-culturally bound users.

From this, a series of interviews were conducted over the course of a year with 9 participants, allowing for ongoing discussions around how they engaged with social media and how they presented identity. The discussions covered their thoughts and impressions of the platforms, their uses of specific features, their social interactions and presentations of identity, the effects of changes in their offline lives upon their online interactions, and the devices through which they accessed these platforms.
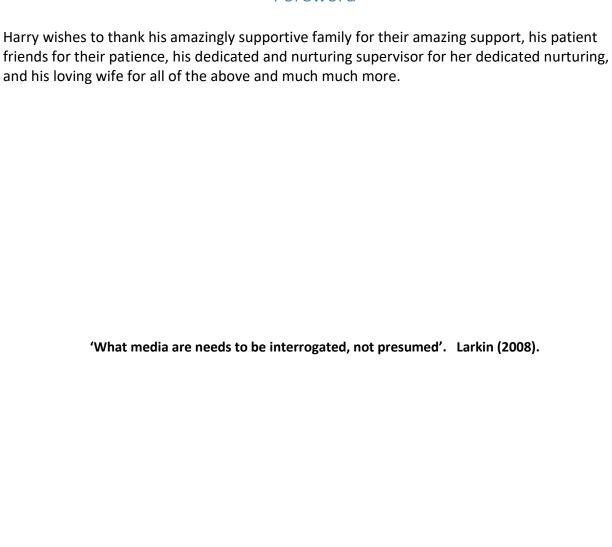
The findings revealed a range of identity performances by young people across an array of platforms, with the participants' specific concerns and needs shaping how they engaged with social media. It was also found that the platforms played a role in shaping the identity performances of the young people, confining what was possible for them and informing how they approached social interaction on each platform. As such, it was noted that identity performances online are nuanced and multi-faceted, and therefore that an approach towards identity performances online needs to account for the interplay between design and user from which unique and ongoing identity performances emerge.

Contents

Foreword

Harry wishes to thank his amazingly supportive family for their amazing support, his patient friends for their patience, his dedicated and nurturing supervisor for her dedicated nurturing, and his loving wife for all of the above and much much more.

'What media are needs to be interrogated, not presumed'.   Larkin (2008).

Chapter 1 – Introduction

An introduction to social media – changes in the field of social media research.

Given the increasing popularity of social media for young people (Lenhart, 2015), there is a pressing need to understand how young people are using social media in their daily lives to act and interact. Indeed, there is no denying the increasingly important and ubiquitous role of the internet and of social media in the everyday lives of many people today. Social media has quickly become incredibly popular, widespread, mundane, and habitual for an increasing number of people (Miller, 2011; Wang et al., 2015). In its relatively short existence[1] the internet has quickly come to serve many broad purposes in everyday life, from social interaction and action, to news (Hermida et al., 2012), shopping (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016), business (Qualman, 2009), politics (Shirky, 2011), and many more growing diverse uses (Waltzman & Shen, 2015). Young people in particular access the internet increasingly frequently (Lenhart, 2015). Vishwanath (2015) for example notes that "young adults in the U.K. report checking their Facebook feeds 20 times on average each day and spend upwards of 40 hours each month or a whole working week utilizing the platform" (Vishwanath, 2015, 83). According to 2015 PEW-collected data, the vast majority, fully 92% of teens in the US, go online daily, with 24% reporting that they go

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[1] The birth of the internet is, like many aspects of digital history, nebulous. Some trace it to Leonard Kleinrock's work in packet networking in the 1960s (Ruthfield, 1995), some credit Tim Berners-Lee's work at CERN in the 1980s (Couldry, 2012), some place it as early as the 1950s with the emergence of WANs (wide-area networks) (Groth & Skandler, 2005), or to 1962 with J.C.R Licklider's work at MIT on the 'Galactic Network' (Leiner et al., 2009; Licklider & Clark, 1962).

For the purpose of this paper, we will be discussing the internet from roughly around 2000 onwards, when there appears to have been a shift away from the internet as a little used communication option to a heavily utilised method of mass communication and interaction. In 1993, only 1% of the information sent through two-way telecommunication networks was via the internet. By 2000 this figure was 51%, and by 2007, it was placed at more than 97% of all information sent (HIlbert & Lopez, 2011).

This shift towards mass communication via the internet seems in some manner tied to the introduction of broadband and of a number of technolgical affordances that followed from this (a theme we will return to during this thesis). Hilbert & Lopez (2011) place 2000 as the start of the 'internet revolution' noting that "the Internet revolution began shortly after the year 2000. In only 7 years, the introduction of broadband Internet effectively multiplied the world's telecommunication capacity by a factor of 29, from 2.2 optimally compressed exabytes in 2000 to 65 in 2007" (Hilbert & Lopez, 2011, 63).

online 'almost constantly' (Lenhart, 2015). Indeed, Lenhart (2015) notes that the majority of teens access the internet several times a day at least, visiting as increasingly diverse range of destinations. Only 12% of teens reported accessing the internet just once a day, and 6% reported going online weekly rather than daily. This of course is drawn from American figures and potentially only reflects internet use in the global north, but there is a growing body of research exploring the use of the internet amongst youth from varying socio-cultural backgrounds and geographic locations (Binsahl et al., 2015; Ling & Horst, 2011), alongside research which specifically focuses upon how internet use is largely effected and shaped by socio-cultural background and exposure to a variety of discourses and media narratives (Dyer, 2016). As these spaces are becoming increasingly relied upon in the everyday social lives of young people, the ways in which identity and interactions play out must be of crucial interest to researchers.

Against this background, this thesis aims to look closely at the effect of social media design upon youth performances of identity online. In order to do so, it proposes Comic Book Theory as a theoretical framework that positions identity performance as individual negotiations between users and platforms. Comic Book Theory, inspired by the works of Goffman (1959), Foucault (1977), Latour (2005), and Barad (2003, 2007), unpacks this complex negotiation by looking at the manner in which specific iterations of identity performances emerge through the enmeshing of users with platform-specific design features. The approach considers not only how identity performances are guided and mediated by aspects of site design, but also how these performances are realised and actualised in individual manners by users calling upon their understanding of other media texts and their specific socio-cultural experiences in order to produce individually realised identity narratives.

The premise underlying this research is that to understand identity performances online, there is a need to look at how individual users engage with this growing variety of features. Any model that attempts to unpack these issues and practises needs to account for the role of the platform in guiding certain action and interactions, but also the role of the user as they respond to the platform design, bringing with them their own intentions and socio-cultural resources. Comic Book Theory, presented in this thesis, suggests that it is through the enmeshing of user and platform design that we can understand identity performance. Given the continuing variety in the scope and aims of different social media platforms (Zhao et al., 2016), even amongst platforms with seemingly similar features (Pittman & Reich, 2016), this research suggests there is a need to account for a range of social media platforms and to look at how the specific design features of each platform effect the ways we act and interact online. As well as this there is also a need to consider how young users negotiate and understand this growing range of social media that is increasingly present in their lives (Boulianne, 2015).

In order to understand how users are negotiating this wide range of social media platforms to present social identities, and to act and interact, the Literature Review in chapter 2 will highlight and discuss key themes and extant literature around the four key aspects of social interaction online that this research aims to account for; namely the role of the user in creating social interactions and identity performances on social media, the effects of site design upon how users act and interact, the role of the technology we use to access social media on our ability to act and interact, and how we can understand and account for the range of social aspects and uses shown in and though social media. From this, this chapter will outline the key research questions to be addressed in this thesis.

Chapter Three will present a theoretical framework through which we can consider identity

performances online as individual, but deeply complex, negotiations between user and site design. The

framework draws upon ideas presented in the field of Comic Book Studies (McCloud, 1993) to combine

a sensibility towards the notion of malleable performative identities proposed by Goffman (1959) with

an understanding of the need to account for the role of the non-human in social life, presented by

Latour (2005) and Barad (2003). The resultant theoretical frame of Comic Book Theory is proposed as a

method to account for the enmeshing of human and non-human to produce online identity

performances.

Chapter Four discusses the methodological framework utilised in this research to unpacking the identity

performances of young people across a range of platforms. From this, a series of interviews were

conducted with 9 participants over the course of a year to examine their individual uses of social media

and their engagement with the design of the platforms. These were analysed using axial coding to

gather key themes and ideas emergent from the interviews.

The key themes that emerged from the interviews are detailed in Chapter Five of this thesis. This

includes discussions with the participants around their unique use of technology, their specific social

experiences online, and their engagement and negotiation with a range of design features across a

range of platform to present identity.

Chapter Six details the key findings in regards to a consideration of the identity performance of young

people online. Discussions include the need to account for a variety of social media platforms, the need

to consider a broad range of uses of social media, and the manner in which we can account for the role of design in identity.

Finally, this thesis concludes in Chapter 7 by revisiting the research question in light of the analysis and discussion. A discussion the of implications of these findings for future research is then provided, including a discussion of the implications of the proposed theoretical framework, and a discussion of the ethical implications raised in the research. We will begin however with a discussion of how best to understand and approach the subject of social media, in turn detailing the scope of the research in regards to social interactions online.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

2.1. Understanding Social Media - It's Complicated...

Though it may seem at first glance to be a relatively simple subject, social media hides within its increasingly expansive scope a number of complexities for researchers. Questions emerge when approaching research around the topic of social media, including exactly how broad an approach towards social aspects online the researcher needs to take, exactly what social elements the research will consider, and how the researched will define social media. Given that social media has become an increasingly ubiquitous (Curran et al., 2016; Kolb & Thach, 2016) part of everyday social life for many users (Baym et al., 2004; Miller, 2011), research has been keen to unpack the effects of the many aspects of social media upon our actions and interactions (Ariel & Avidar, 2015; Misra et al., 2016). As such the subject has attracted a lot of interest from a variety of fields ranging from sociology (Couldry, 2012; Curran et al., 2016), to psychology (Seidman, 2013), geography (Kitchin, 2013), business studies (Safko, 2010), and education (Marsh et al., 2016). Given this broad scope of approaches, there are a similarly wide variety of approaches towards understanding, considering, and defining social media. This section will detail the scope of this research in regards to social media, discussing the key aspects of social media as they pertain to the focus of this research upon the identity performances

Beyond the well-known, and much researched features and practices associated with Facebook and Twitter (Haro-de-Rosario et al., 2016; Leung et al., 2015), a growing range of online platforms today purposefully attempt to utilise features that encourage varying forms of social interaction between users (Dabbagh et al., 2016; Stroud et al., 2016; Zhao et al., 2016) around a range of media content (boyd, 2015; Curran et al., 2016). Features such as comment sections and sharing buttons are, for instance, increasingly common across a wide array of sites and have been noted for their ability to generate social interaction (Bull et al., 2008; Greenhow et al., 2009). Research has also looked at other

features that can encourage social interaction, including the up-voting of content (Oster et al., 2015) or simple view counters (Lange, 2007; Shamma et al., 2011). The ubiquity and commonality of these elements on a wide array of websites potentially blurs the line between dedicated social media platforms and sites that contain social elements and that foster an interactive environment around the content of that site (Alberto et al., 2015; Canter, 2013).

Given this variety of features that work to encourage social interaction, there is limited agreement about what exactly can be considered 'social media' and what cannot. Whilst platforms such as Twitter and Facebook are comfortably accepted as social media, other platforms with social elements are nonetheless often excluded from this discussion. Recent statistical data from PEW (Lenhart, 2015) for example collected data on a range of platforms for their expansive survey on internet usage, but chose to delineate only seven platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Tumblr, Google+ and Vine) as social media platforms. This is despite the fact that in amongst the other platforms were popular platforms with social elements, such as Pinterest, used by 22% of teens (Lenhart, 2015), discussion boards, used by one in six teens, and anonymous sites and apps such as Yik Yak and Ask.FM. Indeed, platforms such as Pinterest have been highlighted for their social elements and the communities that emerge around the sharing of content (Hall & Zarro, 2012; Tekobbe, 2013).

Interestingly for this thesis, research has found that even if the social element does not serve as the site's primary purpose, the inclusion of these interactive features can nonetheless foster an attitude of social interaction and even of community (Barnes, 2015; Zhao et al., 2016). Manosevitch and Walker (2009), for example, in their study of the comment section of two news websites noted that despite neither site explicitly encouraging it, there were ongoing social conversations in the comment sections

of the sites, suggesting "that commenters did not simply 'parachute' in and leave their opinion. Instead, they engaged with one another as well as the issue under discussion" (Manosevitch & Walker, 2009, 22). This presence of social engagement through comment sections is also confirmed by Canter (2009) who found "buoyant levels of interactivity between readers in comment threads" in UK newspaper comment section (Canter, 2009, 604), and by Barnes (2015) in Australian newspaper comment sections who found that many commenters were "actively forming a virtual community, fuelling their own sense of identity through the submission of comments and the dynamic played out through established relationships within that community" (Barnes, 2015, 823). This sense of community and engagement has even been noted in comment sections and platforms that allow anonymity (Coles & West, 2016), strongly suggesting that there is a need to broaden approaches to social interactions online beyond just Facebook and Twitter alone.

There is also a need to expand understandings of the activities and purposes of users on traditional social networking sites (SNS) such as Facebook and Twitter (boyd & Ellison, 2008; Kowert et al., 2016). Research suggests that these platforms are not exclusively social and focused on peer-to-peer interaction (Kwak et al., 2010; Smock et al., 2011). Indeed, these spaces are increasingly diverse (Zhao et al., 2016) and, at the same time, research suggests that many of the traditional criteria that have been used to separate SNS from the rest of the Internet are increasingly moot (Ebner et al., 2015). Aspects that were once considered essential in separating SNSs from other spaces online (boyd & Ellison, 2008) are now questioned, with newer platforms removing the need for public profiles (Heston & Birnholtz, 2016; Khazaei et al., 2016; McKenzie et al., 2015), or a dedicated list of connections (Heston & Birnholtz, 2016; McKenzie et al., 2015). Similarly, social platforms are increasingly integrating private messaging (Doyle, 2015; Karapanos et al., 2016), meaning the notion of a separation of public and private social

spaces that some research has attempted to maintain (Carr & Hayes, 2015) is becoming increasingly

questionable (Korhan & Ersoy, 2016; Ovens & Morison, 2016; Utz, 2015).

Beyond the blurring of SNS into other forms of social interaction online, it appears there is also an issue

of synecdoche[2] in the existing literature. This can be problematic when attempting to consider the

nuances of social media as certain aspects may be exclusively foregrounded and generalised from

(Smock et al., 2011). A number of studies actively conflate social media and SNS, despite the fact that

SNS traditionally represent a rather specific from of social interaction (Croitoru et al., 2015; Dabbagh et

al., 2016; Trottier & Lyon, 2012). For example, both Duggan and Brenner (2013) and Yonker et al. (2015)

shift interchangeably between the use of the term social media and SNS. Hughes et al. (2012) position

Facebook and Twitter as the key platforms online, and generalise about the entirety of social media

from these two platforms. Similarly, Davis (2016) suggests that "social media are interactive,

nonanonymous, network-based Internet technologies that allow for the sharing of user-generated

content" (Davis, 2016, 137). Whilst this is a generally accurate description of how users interact on

certain SNS such as Facebook and Twitter, this certainly cannot be applied or generalised to all social

media, especially given the recent resurgence of anonymity in social media (McKenzie et al., 2015) and

the popularity of platforms such as Reddit and Tumblr that do not require the sharing of personal

information. Ironically, Davis accredits her own earlier work as justification for this definition of social

media, citing Davis and Jurgenson (2014). However, the cited Davis and Jurgenson article is not as

specific as Davis' 2016 definition, with Davis and Jurgenson (2014) pointing out that a large number of

users use more than one social media platform, and defining social media thusly: "by social media, we

refer to the set of interactive Internet applications which facilitate (collaborative or individual) creation,

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[2] Synecdoche refers to the use of a part to refer to the whole, or visa versa - for example, the use of 'Hoover' to refer to all vacuum cleaners

curation, consumption, and sharing of user-generated content" (Davis & Jurgenson, 2014, 477). This second definition allows for a wider array of social platforms that does not limit aspects such as anonymity (Coles & West, 2016). It appears, given the growing range and variety of social platforms, that not only is there a need to consider an array of platforms when considering social interaction, but there is also a need to pay attention to the particularities of that platform rather than generalising the scope and shape of social interaction online from SNSs alone. Instead, it must be noted that SNSs represent one aspect of social interaction online, and that social experiences are increasingly diverse. It is also apparent, given the increased presence of social features on a range of platforms, that SNSs are increasingly less of a discrete and wholly distinct category.

Another issue with considering SNSs in isolation is the notion of a 'site'. This is increasingly fraught in digital research as it is in part a hangover of 'website'. Social media however is rapidly moving away from the website-only format towards the use of applications or apps (Zhao et al., 2016). Statistics suggest that over three quarters of American teens have or have access to smartphones which they use to access the internet (Lenhart, 2015). Some of the most popular social media platforms such as Snapchat and Yik Yak (Lenhart, 2015) are viewed only in app-based form on mobile. Equally, sites like Twitter and Facebook can be reached on a range of different devices. Given the shift to a range of platforms beyond just websites (a trend that looks likely to continue to evolve with the influx of augmented and virtual reality), the need to avoid synecdoche, and the various uses of social media beyond networking (Smock et al., 2011), this research will eschew the term SNS, and instead continue to purposefully utilise the broader umbrella term of *social media.*

As such this thesis aims to purposefully look at a broad array of social platforms and a broad array social media online rather than just SNS. Obviously, due to the abundance of easily mineable data from a wide audience, Facebook and Twitter currently attract a lot of attention from researchers. Nonetheless this research and the implications drawn from it do not match the experiences of many users (Zhao et al. 2016) for whom social interaction is happening across a range of sites and spaces (Barnes, 2015; Canter, 2013; Lenhart, 2015). As Carr and Hayes (2015) highlight, a narrow focus "could impede theoretical development of social media more broadly" (Carr & Hayes, 2015, 49). Increasingly the 'web 2.0' mentality of user contribution across a range of media spaces has allowed for many diverse spaces and platforms to build social community and encourage new forms and models of social interaction (Kowert et al., 2016; Zhao et al., 2016). It is clear that with the growth in user interactions across a plethora of diverse platforms (Lenhart, 2015) the use of the term SNS as a catch-all is increasingly problematic and that findings drawn from one social media platform cannot be applied universally (Katz & Crocker 2015; Stroud et al., 2016). Given this, this thesis will provide a theoretical frame capable of examining social media and moving beyond a reliance upon the structures and affordances of Facebook and Twitter. With the parameters of the notion of social media adopted in the thesis established, this chapter will now move on to consider some of the implications of a broader approach towards social media.

The need for a consideration of the specificities and designs of social media platforms.

Beyond the need to consider a broad range of platforms, there is also a need to consider the specificities of each platform and the unique ways in which they may be used. This is aptly highlighted by Stroud et al. (2016), who note that across 155 news websites the use of social features such as social media buttons, hyperlinks, polls, and comments largely differed. They found little support for any interactive convergence, instead noting "many differences in the adoption and use of interactive features based on

medium and target" (Stroud et al., 2016, 339). Even amongst sites that ostensibly share the same purpose of sharing news, Stroud et al. (2016) noted that the context of the site plays a large part in how users engage with these features, suggesting that merely noting the presence of these features is not enough to understand how they are being used to socially act and interact. Given the noted effect of context upon the use of media features this thesis will attempt to look at how features are utilised and used in context, paying attention to the use of features from one site to the next rather than assuming that specific media elements alone will create and foster similar uses across a range of contexts.

This can be further highlighted by literature that focuses upon cases of 'trolling', anti-social, and uncivil behaviour online, which research suggests may be more prevalent in certain contexts, such as sites and platforms that offer anonymity (Coles & West, 2016; Dyer 2016; Massanari, 2015). Rowe (2015) for example looked at the comment section of the *Washington Post* which allows users to post anonymously, and compared the comments to those left on the *Washington Post*'s Facebook site where users had to use personal Facebook accounts to leave a comment. Rowe found that the *Washington Post* website had far more incivility and impoliteness as well as a greater likelihood for purposefully directed hurtful comments than the Facebook page. Similar findings have been found by other researchers (Cho & Acquisti, 2013; Hille & Bakker, 2014; Van der Nagel & Firth, 2015). It appears then that interactive affordances, such as comment sections, are not used in uniform manners. Context, it seems, matters.

Given this, other researchers have begun to question the treatment of a vast range of social media platforms as analogous entities simply due to a commonality of features (see Dewing, 2010; Madden et al., 2013). Others have now begun to highlight that many unique factors and contexts can affect the

ways in which users engage with features (Dyer, 2015; Kowert et al., 2016; Stroud et al., 2016). Katz and

Crocker (2015) make the key point that researchers should be careful to contextualise the use of

features such as the ability to take and post selfies. In the results of their survey conducted into the

subject of selfies then noted that: "when it came to selfies, the users that we interviewed suggested that

they viewed selfies generated via Snapchat differently than ones published on more public platforms or

saved onto mobile communication devices" (Katz & Crocker 2015, 7). It would appear therefore that

focusing upon the affordances offered is not nearly enough to understand the platform, there is also a

need to consider the use of those affordances on a platform-by-platform basis in relation to the

individual user as well as the intended audience. In the case of Katz and Crocker's (2015) findings, they

noted that:

> *"rather than being a single phenomenon with a singular purpose of engagement, we found that*
> *the selfie category encompasses a range of use and intention. The platforms, subject matter, and*
> *audience all impact how users engage with selfies and the reasons for taking them"* (Katz &
> Crocker 2015, 10).

My own research in this area (Dyer, 2015) highlights the need to consider the specificities of the

platform, noting that despite Facebook and Twitter sharing many similar features, a number of factors

such as the differences in how these platforms framed the reasons for socially interacting affected how

users interacted, who they interacted with, and how they presented their identities. Similarly, Duguay

(2016) looked at the differences in use between Vine and Instagram for queer women, noting that

despite both platforms ostensibly involving the sharing of visual data, the types of interactions varied,

with Vine interactions showing creativity and Instagram interactions revolving around expressions of

beauty and femininity. Though both platforms revolved around the sharing of visual data, as Kunze

(2014) notes, Vine allows more creative control and editing, which in turn impacts how users approach conceptualizing and sharing visual data. Researchers from a variety of fields are increasingly considering how design may affect our actions online (Bowler et al., 2015; Karimov et al., 2011). Kowert et al. (2016) in particular issues a call to researchers to "consider the idiosyncrasies of these different social platforms, particularly when one is discussing any potential positive or negative impacts they may have on individuals" (Kowert et al., 2016: 3). They go on to highlight that:

> *"although they (social media platforms) all provide a basis for promoting interaction between users via the Internet, their social utilities, or more specifically their key features and ability to connect users and provide a sense of social connectedness, vary widely. Recognising the unique characteristics of different mediated, social spaces is key to understanding what role these different social services play in our everyday lives, how they are utilized, and what social impact (if any) they may have on users over time"* (Kowert et al., 2016, 5).

It is this call for contextualisation issued by Kowert et al. (2016) that this thesis therefore aims to provide, not only focusing on a wide range of platforms, but also considering the specificities of design within those platforms. The approach therefore needs to be both broad and specific. Research suggests that even simple differences between platforms may result in different manifestations of identity, different forms of social interaction and action, and changes in how the user negotiates and understands these spaces (Stroud et al., 2016). Given that research shows that the same features can be used in different ways across different sites (Hille & Bakker, 2014; Stroud et al., 2016), assuming that patterns and styles of use for features used on Facebook and Twitter will correspond to other platforms appears problematic. Given this, this chapter will now move on to look at the role of social media in the lives of young people.

2.2. Social Media and young adult identity. why youth <3 social media.

Whilst we have considered what social media is, it is worth considering more specifically what it represents to young people. Recent data shows a significant growth in social media use over the last decade, with only 8% of Americans using any type of social media in 2005 compared to fully 90% of 18-29 year olds in 2015 (Perrin, 2015). Data suggest that young people are vital to this growth (Boulianne, 2015; Herring & Kapidzic, 2015) and that "those ages 18 to 29 have always been the most likely users of social media by a considerable margin" (Perrin, 2015, 4). Indeed, it appears that these platforms form an increasingly important element in the daily social lives of young people (Fardouly et al., 2015) with a reported 92% of young people accessing the internet daily (Lenhart, 2015), meaning "teens virtually always have a digital device at their fingertips" (Wartella et al., 2016, 13). A recent IDC report (2013) found that 89% of 18-24 year olds check their device within the first 15 minutes of waking up. Importantly it appears to be a wide array of platforms that form part of daily social life for young people (Absar et al., 2015; Hodkinson, 2015) with 71% of teens reported as using more than one platform (Lenhart, 2015). It is suggested that it is important "to study youth as a separate sub-group, as there appear to be differences in the ways young people and adults use social networking sites" (Agosto & Abbas, 2013: 137), including changes in frequency (Agostos & Abbas, 2013), and reasons for engaging with the platforms (Antheunis et al., 2014).

However, it is not just the popularity of these platforms that is important to the young people, but rather the increasingly important role they play in contemporary social life (Bolton et al., 2013; Robards, 2014), "shaping how adults and youth interact with each other in school, at home, and at large" (Goldman et al., 2008:185). It has been argued that social media is now "compulsory among groups of young people" (Hodkinson, 2015:1), and a "fundamental fact of modern life" (boyd, 2014:26). Indeed, as

early as 2005, young people were described as the "constant contact generation" (Clark, 2005:203). Research suggests social media platforms play an integral role in how young people socialise, interact, and form identities (Mark et al., 2016; Wartella et al., 2016; Wood et al., 2016). Quinn and Oldmeadow (2013a, 2013b) for example suggest that young people feel noticeably less socially connected without social media and internet-enabled technologies. Similarly, in their survey of nearly 100 students, Mazzoni and Iannone (2014) suggest that social media forms "part of the functional organs that support emerging adults in their ability to connect and to be connected to a social network and to develop and maintain it over time" (Mazzoni & Iannone, 2014, 303).

Social Media now serves many purposes in the social lives of young people (Wood et al., 2016), including enhancing broad socialisation and independence (Ito et al., 2009), serving as a means of emotional connection (Reich, 2010), increasing self-esteem and well-being (Antheunis et al., 2014), increasing a sense of closeness with contacts (Valkenburg & Peter, 2007), increasing the quality of friendships (Antheunis et al., 2014), and decreasing loneliness and improving self-reported adjustment (Yang & Brown, 2013). Valkenburg and Peter (2011) go as far as to suggest that not utilising social media may in fact be detrimental to young users.

Given that social media is increasingly important to adolescents and young adults in their daily social lives (Hodkinson, 2015), and that an increasing amount of social activity is being conducted across an array of social media platforms (Lenhart, 2015), it is important to interrogate how these various platforms are affecting and shaping how youth are presenting themselves and how they are acting and interacting. Many youths describe themselves as always connected (Cheug, 2016), and spend large portions of their days involved in various social media activity (Bauman & Rivers, 2015), meaning for

many it is a large aspect of their social interactions. The research underpinning this dissertation will therefore unpack how young people are enmeshing with a range of platforms to produce unique identity performances.

Research into identity online.

Adolescence and young adulthood has been established as a key time in the development of social identity (Anderson & Fleming, 1986; Erikson, 1959), with peer relationships of increasing concern as young people begin to pay more attention and weight to how they are socially perceived (Sullivan, 1953; Wood et al., 2016). Given that adolescents and young adults are spending increasing periods of time online during this key period in identity development (Absar et al., 2015; Wartella et al., 2016), research suggests that much of their identity development and social exploration is now taking place through social media (boyd, 2014; Pujazon-Zazik & Park, 2010).

The increased importance of social media in the lives of young people during this key developmental period has led to some concern over the damaging impact of these platforms (Chandrashekhar et al., 2016; Phillips, 2016). Research has highlighted issues including the future impact of content produced during this time (Langenfeld et al., 2014), and the potential lack of control over who young people are interacting with (Yang, 2016). Researchers continue to unpack new risks of these online spaces as the internet becomes increasingly ubiquitous (Livingstone et al., 2015). Nonetheless, others are keen to highlight the many positive aspects of social media for identity development (boyd, 2014; Rooney, 2015), suggesting that social media offers an ideal avenue through which to express identity (Park, 2015), and to explore through autonomous social interaction (Wood et al., 2016). Indeed, research

suggests social media aids youth social identity development by offering young adults a space of their

own to socially explore (Fongkaew & Fongkaew, 2016; Hodkinson, 2015; Renold & Ringrose, 2016).

Regardless of the positives and negatives of these spaces for the development of youth identity, it is

clear that these platforms are embedded in the daily social lives of young users (Lenhart, 2015), and as a

consequence, are increasingly important for the exploration of identity at a time when this is a key

concern for young users (Rubin et al., 2015; Wood et al., 2016). Given this, it is worth considering the

role that the design and affordances of the platforms play in shaping identity, especially as research

suggests that identity formation is increasingly taking place online across a wider range of platforms

than ever before, meaning exposure to more designs and a wider array of elements (Jordan-Conde et

al., 2014; Wood et al., 2016). As boyd and Ellison (2008) suggest, "social networking sites constitute an

important research context for scholars investigating processes of impression management,

self-presentation, and friendship performance" (boyd & Ellison, 2008, 219).

But how to conceive of identity online? Though identity is often conceived of in terms of the

psychological concept of a central 'self' (Baumeister, 1999; Rogers, 1961; Lewis, 1990), a wealth of

research has been conducted suggesting that the best way to understand and frame identity online is

through a consideration of outward social behaviour and expressions. In other words, a consideration of

the external performance of a crafted social identity through the various mediums provided online for

self-presentation, social expression, and interaction (Herring & Kapidzic, 2015; Wood et al., 2016).

This is often done through the frame of Goffman's work around the metaphor of performativity (Bertel,

2016; Evans, 2015; Van der Nagel & Firth, 2015; see also section 3.3 of this thesis). Essentially, Goffman

(1959) suggested that identity was best conceived of as social performances given for a particular

audience in a particular situation. It was Goffman's assertion that identity is formed in and through

social interactions; rather than considering a fixed and innate core 'self', we should instead see identity

as a malleable and plural socially constructed performance crafted for a specific social situation (Lemert

& Branaman, 1997; Elliott, 2008). Therefore, for Goffman, (1959) identity was framed in terms of a

performance; through agential social actions and interactions. As Rueda-Ortiz and Giraldo (2016)

suggest, "the presentation of the self emerges from interaction with others; therefore, the role to be

played is always socially situated" (Rueda-Ortiz & Giraldo, 2016, 42). This approach seems particularly

suitable for researching identity online, as social media largely consists of outward social actions and

interactions through a variety of provided forms of social behaviour (boyd, 2007; Davies, 2012).

This performative notion of identity has successfully been explored in online contexts. Uski and

Lampinen (2016) for example studied what they defined as 'profile work'; strategic self-presentation

online. Observing Facebook and the music-sharing platform Last.fm, they focused upon how users

maintained a feeling of authenticity in their presentations of identity. They noted that despite the users

presenting differing identities across the two sites, the presentations were still seen as an 'authentic'

presentations of self. Similarly, Sundén (2003) described early use of social media in terms of

performative identity, suggesting that on Myspace, adolescent users wrote and performed their

identities through careful profile design involving the use of music, images, videos, and background

templates to manage how they were perceived by the audience, a trait noted by other researchers on

Myspace (Donnath & boyd, 2004) and other platforms (Hodkinson, 2015).

This concept of performed identity holds particular interest when we again consider the need for

platform specificity and a consideration of design. Research suggests that social media platforms "afford

a variety of tools that potentially extend and compromise impression management" (Mendelson &

Papachrissi, 2011, 254). Research has traditionally focused upon how these take the form of textual

communication and interaction, and visual representations (Ellison et al., 2007; Herring & Kapidzic,

2015). However more recently, with the increased variety in platforms (Zhao et al., 2016) users are able

to explore and choose different ways of presenting identities online through an array of features (Stroud

et al., 2016). Further to this, the use of design features for identity presentation has been noted as being

platform specific (Lafkioui, 2013), with researcher such as Van Dijck (2013) noting different uses of

similar features on Facebook and LinkedIn to perform different identities.

The need to consider the specificities of platform design when considering identity presentation has

been highlighted by Van den Berg (2007) who discussed the notion of 'staging' online. For Van den Berg

(2007) identity became a concept that was dependent upon situation, with any changes in situation

leading to a shifts in how the performer read the 'script' of the identity performance. Others such as

Skog (2005) found that the addition of a reward system on the social platform 'LunarStorm' increased

the use of the platform for identity presentation. Given this, it is worth noting that identity performance

"does not occur in isolation but is determined by the context in which it occurs" (Young, 2009, 42). This

research seeks to show therefore that, despite their many similarities, we should not assume all social

media platforms function in a similar way, but that a detailed investigation of each site is necessary to

understand identity performance (Van Dijck, 2013). Given this, this research will unpack the effect of

specific designs upon how the user socially presents identity online.

Whilst we have positioned the approach taken towards understanding the media aspects of social media

in this research, the shift towards materialities in the social sciences and elsewhere renders it important

to consider the role and impact of the technologies we use to access social media. As such, this chapter

will now move on to look at the extant literature around the technologies we use to access social media.

2.3. Technological changes over time – how the technology we use to access social media can change and shape our ability to act and interact.

As established previously, social media continues to progress and change, adding new ways of acting and interacting. So too do the devices and technologies through which we access social media (Green et al., 2015). This research wishes to consider how user and platform design enmesh, but in order to do so, there is a need to consider how the growing range of devices through which users access these platforms shape and effect how users experience and utilise social media.

It is apparent that a fixed understanding of the effects of social media is inherently hampered by the relentless pace of innovation and changes in the technology used to access it. At the time of writing, in 2016, social media has mostly been transferred to smartphone (Lenhart, 2015), as technology has become more accessible (Čičević et al., 2016), less niche, and able to handle more data (Dewing, 2010). The progression of technological capabilities afforded by mobile technology has allowed for easy access to more options for social interaction beyond text-based content (Hinton & Hjorth, 2013; Lovink, 2012), and has changed how users consume social media, making it more portable (Utz et al., 2015), more pervasive (Pempek et al., 2009) and easily accessible (Čičević et al., 2016; Lampe et al., 2008). This progression in technology over the decades has meant in turn that social media has become less niche and fantasy-based (Dourish, 1998) and instead more important to social interaction and the operation and organisation of everyday social life (Chun, 2016; Vromen et al., 2015). It has been noted, for example, that "today, with the popularity of 'always on' mobile media allowing users to perpetually surf

across social and locative media apps, the internet has become an embedded part of mundane social life" (Hinton & Hjorth, 2013, 7).

The development of mobile technology has also given young people more control over how and when they can use technology for social interaction (Buckingham, 2008; Thulin & Vilhelmson, 2007), allowing them to produce more data and access social media more frequently (Goldman et al., 2008). Smartphones now are increasingly popular and are, according to PEW data, the main means of access to social media today for many users in the global north (Lenhart, 2015). The proliferation of this technology has been noted as changing the internet habits of young people. Lenhart (2015) suggests that 56% of teens go online several times a day, with over 90% of teens going online at least once daily. The majority of social media consumption is now purportedly done via smartphone, with Anderson (2015) suggesting ownership of these devices has almost doubled since 2011, and is likely to continue to grow.

The development of the devices used to access social media has had a number of effects upon how users act and interact online, including aiding the rise of new forms of social interaction, with the dominance of portable screens and the emergence of increasingly advanced camera technology on phones also leading to a growth in interactions through largely visual mediums such as Snapchat and Instagram (Bayer et al., 2016; Piwek & Joinson, 2016). Katz and Crocker (2015) noted that selfies - self-portraits taken with a phone - are increasingly commonplace, and accompanied by an ecology of filters and editing software, with 96% of respondents in the UK taking selfies. They also noted importantly that selfies were increasingly serving a conversational function and being used in social interactions. Research suggests that there is also now more variety for social interaction online (Green et al., 2015;

Nunes, 2011), or what boyd and Ellison (2008) suggest is an expansion in niche communities as users

who share common interests can now easily connect. The increased variety and importance of social

media and its ability to capture the personal details and interactions of users' lives has led to a marked

growth in 'big data' research which mines this expansive data (Chen et al., 2014; Gandomi & Haider,

2015). The growth in data brought about by new devices has also changed how users consume social

media, leading to various new etiquettes for data sharing and image sharing (Carrigan, 2016; Fuller &

Allen, 2016), including changes in the time taken to respond to messages (Mai et al., 2015), and

attitudes towards a peer's content (Katz & Crocker, 2015) as well as particular awareness of privacy

settings and practices. Other changes in social interaction bought about by the development of

technology can be seen in the research around the use of GPS, which looks at how technology has

enabled the integration of physical locations into social interactions (Erikson, 2010; Saker, 2016), or as

Cramer et al. (2011) put it, "ultimately, what this means is that location has changed from being

something you *have* (a property or state) to something you *do* (an action)" (Cramer et al., 2011: 65;

italics in original).

Given all this, it is clear that our experiences and uses of social media cannot be disconnected from the

technology through which we access them. Changes in technology have led to changes in how users

contextualise and approach media forms for social interaction, embedding them deeply into the daily

social interaction of many users (Hinton & Hjorth, 2013). It is apparent that any research hoping to

understand how users are acting and interacting online should pay some attention to the technology

through which users are accessing social media. In order to consider how the devices used to access the

internet change the participants' uses and experiences of social media, this thesis will move in section

3.4 to consider the work of McLuhan (1964) alongside the works of Latour (2005) and Barad (2003).

2.4. Understanding the users of social media - not all actors are equal.

Whilst research has traditionally suggested that social media creates a level playing field between participants (Kerr et al., 2012; Kowert et al., 2016) and that the internet offers "a more decentralised model of media production" (Miller, 2011, 12), others have pointed out that this is not as clear cut (Butler & Matook, 2015; Fenton, 2016), and that "different social media sites structure these production and consumption roles differently" (Bright et al., 2014, 14). The role and power of the user online appears to fluctuate from platform-to-platform, with differing levels of control over how a user can act and interact (Keller, 2012; Gibbs et al, 2016). It is also self-evident that users are not a homogeneous group. Rather, as Chaudry (2015) notes, users approach, utilise, and understand social media differently, as a result of the socio-cultural resources they bring with them when they approach social media.

A particularly useful example of these socio-culturally informed uses of social media is the growing body of research that specifically focuses upon the concept of 'Black Twitter'; the use of Twitter by black communities (Sharma, 2013). Florini (2013), for example, notes that as the user's physical body can be obscured on Twitter, black communities utilise "the linguistic practice of 'signifyin', which deploys figurative language, indirectness, doubleness, and wordplay as a means of conveying multiple layers of meaning" (Florini, 2013, 1). Sharma (2013), similarly looks at the use of racialized hashtags, dubbed 'blacktags' to understand how online racial identities are materialised in unique socio-culturally informed manners through the technology of online platforms. Importantly for this research, Sharma notes that "software platforms, algorithms, digital networks and affects - are constitutive of online racialized identities." (Sharma, 2013, 46). He notes in particular that the use of these features in a specific manner and the emergent identities are unique to Twitter as a platform, and to this particular

racial group. He suggests therefore that, "beyond conceiving Black Twitter as a group of preconstituted users tweeting racialized hashtags, Blacktags are instrumental in producing networked subjects which have the capacity to multiply the possibilities of being raced online" (Sharma, 2013, 46). As such, identity performance online here becomes framed as a mix of offline social ideals and concepts and specific formats online to result in unique performances of identity in a specific medium. This concept is further iterated by other researchers, such as Nakamura and Chow-White (2011, 5) who note that "race itself has become a digital medium, a distinctive set of informatic codes, networked mediated narratives, maps, images, visualizations that index identity". Other research has looked at the unique uses and appropriations of social media from users of a wide range of socio-cultural communities, including queer communities (Fowler, 2012), Christian communities (Thornton & Evans, 2015), Korean 'k-pop' fandoms (Song et al., 2015), Qataris (Vieweg & Hodges, 2016) and many more, all of which use social media in different ways and approach social media with different goals and aims.

It has been noted that a user's socio-cultural background not only affects their approach towards social media, but also their treatment online. Researchers have noted for example manifestations of online racism (Nguyen, 2016), sexism and misogyny (Cole, 2015), homophobia (Rubin & McClelland, 2015) and a number of other unequal treatments of users online that suggest that a user's experiences and interactions online are not uniform nor are they isolated within online spaces. Instead they are bound fast to their socio-cultural background. This is aptly highlighted in the cases of trolling and anti-social behaviour through comment sections seen in famous cases such as 'gamergate' (Dyer, 2016) in which female social media users were systematically hounded and abused because of their gender, and as such had to develop strategies for approaching and using social media (Massanari, 2015). Equal access therefore does not always mean equal treatment, equal representation, or equal voices (Lil Miss Hot Mess, 2015; Niedt, 2016). Clearly, though the potential for social media is levelling, in reality systemic

privileges and the prevalence of socially normative expectations still prevail online, affecting many aspects of the social media experience from how users access social media to how they are treated on it.

Users and their social media practices and identities cannot necessarily be understood in relation to broader affiliations alone. Researchers have also crucially pointed out the need to account for individual user nuances and experiences beyond their broad socio-cultural affiliations (Fox & Warber, 2015). Lindqvist et al. (2011) observed novel uses of Foursquare, a GPS-based social media platform, noting "some unexpected uses of foursquare, for example…people who used foursquare with safety in mind or for safety purposes, either by checking-in as they were leaving a place, or checking-in when they arrived at a place" (Lindqvist et al., 2011, 9). Research has also looked at individual expressions of identity online through 'cultural jamming', in which users take images and text from advertising online, altering and re-distributing these to subvert the meaning of the original advert (Duncum, 2015; Peretti, 2006). Fox and Warber (2015) also noted variation in how individual members of socio-cultural groups approached social media to perform identity, noting gay users interacted differently based on whether they had publicly declared their sexuality. Given this, it would seem appropriate to argue that in order to understand why people are interacting online and performing identity in the manner they are, both individual context and broader offline socio-cultural influences need to be taken into account alongside the effects of aspects of design and technology.

It is also important to again highlight therefore the importance of platform design in these performances and practices. Research has noted that specific design choices can affect certain socio-cultural groups more than others (Coles & West, 2016). However, it has been suggested that it is naïve to assume that

"hostility results from assumed online anonymity rather than from social or culture dynamics which may occur offline as well as online" (Lange, 2007:361). Research suggests that it is not as simple as merely highlighting the particular affordances that are used to elicit abuse, as there is a need to consider also "the user's ability to exert control over content" (Nash, 2012:199). Sundar (2004) for example notes in his study of interactivity online that understanding interactions online requires looking at both the platform design and the specific users involved in the interaction. It can be suggested therefore that:

> "social media users are the ones that decide whether and how much information to share, and when and whether to comment on a social media platform. Hence, not solely the technological features of a platform determine its level of interactivity and sociability, but the actual performances of its users" (Ariel and Avidar, 2015,19).

As such it is apparent that there is a need to consider both the socio-cultural grounding of the user, and design feature. It has been noted that individual users will utilise design features in unique ways. Hamison et al. (2016) for example notes that transitioning transsexual users engage in strategies and tactics to negotiate the permanence of data across a variety of platforms, creating novel uses of the platform features. It has been noted therefore that there may be "discrepancies between designer goals and how the features are used in practice" (Epstein et al., 2015, 1622). Indeed, often the uses of devices cannot be anticipated by designers. For example, when created in the 1980s, mobile phones were intended to be used mainly for voice messages (Taylor & Vincent, 2005). Text messaging was originally seen as "an add-on without much potential for commercial significance" (Acker, 2014, 559). After users rapidly appropriated text functionality Bar et al. (2016) note that "operators quickly embraced users' enthusiasm and made SMS a core component of their offering" (Bar et al., 2016, 12). It is apparent

therefore that it is the enmeshing of specific user and specific design that needs to be considered, rather than the potential of design, or the user's socio-cultural background alone.

Given this, in order to consider the complexities of social identity performances online, a theoretical framework that considers how a user's individual and broad socio-cultural factors become enmeshed with specific online platforms to produce individual identity performances is needed. An emphasis needs to be placed upon how different users will bring different social resources to social media to produce unique iterations of identity, but with an understanding that their performances will still be shaped to varying degrees by the design of the specific platforms and mediums through which they act and interact socially. As Sharma (2013) highlights in his analysis of racial uses of Twitter, "both race and digital networks transformed in their mutual encounter" (Sharma, 2013, 47). Such a framework for unpacking the multi-faceted creation of an identity narrative impacted and impacting on both the medium/platform and the user's own socio-cultural background will be provided through a reading of Comic Book Studies, detailed in the theory chapter of this thesis.

As the aim of this research is to consider how users negotiate and navigate social platforms to produce specific identity performance, and to look at how much this is mediated and shaped by the specific affordances and designs of the platforms, this chapter will now move on to consider how best to consider social interaction online.

2.5. Understanding the 'social' aspects of social media.

As the internet becomes more and more common in the lives of young users (Lenhart, 2015) in is

apparent that there is the need to examine the reality of the internet rather than potential it offers

(Baym et al., 2004; Miller, 2011). In other words, "the reality of the Internet is more important that the

dazzle" (Haythornthwaite & Wellman, 2002:5). This means exploring the reality of social media in all its

embedded everyday mundanity (Selwyn & Sterling, 2016). Due to the advancements in social media in

the last decade research suggests that there is a need to consider an increasingly broad variety of social

uses and experiences online (Absar et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2014). Interestingly, and perhaps because of

the growing variety of possibilities afforded by the progression of technology, there seems to be little

consensus as to the exact type of social interaction afforded by social media, with researchers defining

the social aspects of social media in a variety of contradictory manners. For example, Kent (2010)

highlights that social media affords specific forms of social interaction that offer, amongst other traits

"reduced anonymity, a sense of propinquity" (Kent, 2010, 645). Tierney (2013) however defines social

interaction online in an opposite manner from Kent's definition, noting that it lacks the "openness and

visibility" (Tierney, 2013:34) present in offline communication. Equally others have counter-argued this,

suggesting that we have never been more visible than we are online (Lee & Cook, 2015; Morrow et al.,

2015).

It is apparent then that there are a growing range of complex and multi-faceted social experiences

online that need to be accounted for beyond the traditional focus upon peer-to-peer networking

(Gyberg & Lunde, 2015), especially as experiences online are diversifying beyond Facebook and Twitter

alone (Lenhart, 2015; Zhao et al., 2016). These platforms have long been the focus of research into

social interactions online (Barker, 2009; Beer, 2008; boyd, 2007), but, as boyd and Ellison (2008) suggest, SNS are "different from the rest of the web" (boyd & Ellison, 2008, 211), and it is apparent the rest of the web increasingly needs to be accounted for when considering what social experiences online entail (Barnes, 2015; Zhao et al., 2016). Whilst it has been suggested that many of these differences are becoming less pronounced with SNSs adopting features and ideas from other aspects of the internet (Ebner et al., 2015), it is clear that to understand social interaction online, a broader understanding is needed beyond communication with established offline contacts alone. It has been noted that:

> *"Some social media websites dedicate themselves to a specific theme or niche interest, whilst others attempt to create a more general type of space for social interaction (within which more specific niches can spring up). Social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, for example, are generalist: a wide variety of social interactions can take place on them. Other sites such as LinkedIn (a site designed for professional connections) or Mumsnet (a site designed for parents to meet and discuss) have more of a specific theme"* (Bright et al., 2014:15).

Given this we cannot assume that findings regarding the social interactions viewed and researched on 'generalised' social media sites can be equally transferred the specific communities online who may interact differently.

Further complicating this reliance upon networking alone when considering social interaction online is the notion that networking itself appears to be flexible, with networking actualising itself differently from one site to the next not only in terms of aims and specificities, but also in terms of the modes through which this networking manifests itself. For this reason, boyd and Ellison (2008) make the distinction to use the term 'Social Network Site' rather than 'Networking'. They suggest that this is due to the fact that networking implies a new connection, which is not always the case on platforms such as Facebook, which they suggest is commonly used to further and extend already existing connection.

However, of course, researchers have noted the use of Facebook for 'networking' with strangers from as early as 2006 (Lampe et al., 2006). There are a number of popular SNSs whose primary purpose *is* to make new connections. Indeed, the proliferation of dating sites and the popularity of Tinder and Grindr only serve to prove this point (Blackwell et al., 2014). As such, boyd and Ellison's claim that "what makes Social Network Sites unique is not that they allow individuals to meet strangers, but rather that they enable users to articulate and make visible their social networks" (boyd and Ellison, 2008, 211) cannot be upheld if we are to account for the growing array of social experiences online beyond this form of networking alone.

Some researchers further problematize the manifestation of the social online, pointing out that multiple social experiences can exist on the same platform (Hopke et al., 2016; Stroud et al., 2016). Much of the research into social interaction online traditionally focuses upon the maintenance of existing social connections (Barker, 2009; Ross et al., 2009). Mendelson and Papacharissi (2011) for example discuss how SNSs create "a culture of remote connectivity for …maintaining a variety of social ties to primary and secondary groups of contact" (Mendelson and Papacharissi, 2011, 251). However, whilst this is undoubtedly an aspect of the social media experience for many users, it is apparent that this is not the only experience and that social interaction can exist for many reasons, with research suggesting that users following celebrities (Hopke et al., 2016), companies (Baird & Parasnis, 2011), and other interest groups (Lookadoo & Dickson, 2015), alongside using these platforms for the consumption of news, culture, and political information (Harder et al., 2016), all of which can be used to express aspects of the user's identity (Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016). As such, it is apparent that social experiences, even within SNSs, can be broad:

> *"the cultures that emerge around SNSs are varied. Most sites support the maintenance of pre-*
>
> *existing social networks, but others help strangers connect based on shared interests, political*

views, or activities. Some sites cater to diverse audiences, while others attract people based on common language or shared racial, sexual, religious, or nationality based identities" (boyd & Ellison, 2008, 210).

It appears then that not only can we not generalise the type of social interactions witnessed in SNS to social media writ large but we also cannot generalise *within* SNS as types of social interaction may differ from one platform to the next (Blank & Lutz, 2016; García-Martín & García-Sánchez, 2015). This further highlights the need to consider social interactions on a platform-by-platform basis, and importantly, to not over-estimate the importance of networking with established contacts at the expense of other social experiences online.

Indeed, it is apparent that there is an increasingly broad array of users online now (Perrin, 2015), creating a variety of social experiences online. Researchers have highlighted possible 'context collapse' online (Davis & Jurgenson, 2014; Utz, 2015), with users having to balance possible input from friends, family, celebrities, companies, politicians, and news organisations amongst others. It has been noted that "social media technologies collapse multiple audiences into single contexts, making it difficult for people to use the same techniques online that they do to handle multiplicity in face-to-face conversation" (Marwick & boyd, 2011, 114). Research has begun to highlight that this context collapse means that multiple social experiences are merging within platforms so that, for example, private and public social interactions might intertwine (Korhan & Ersoy, 2016; Ovens & Morison, 2016), as might fandom and family, or friends and work (Carrigan, 2016; Fuller & Allen, 2016). Much like we do offline then (Goffman, 1959), it appears that users online still manage multiple social styles at once (Marwick & boyd, 2011).

Given this discussion, it appears that there is a broad array of social interactions online, not only across the growing range of social media platforms, but also within the more well-researched SNS, many of which can serve multiple purposes for users (Davis & Jurgenson, 2014; Utz, 2015) who are interacting with a wide array of contacts (Fuller & Allen, 2016). It is important to highlight, as Wu et al. (2011) do, that if researchers use a specific definition of 'social' to shape their understanding of the user's experience of social media, they risk only seeing a narrow part of the social media experience, or assuming that this is the 'default' use and that other uses and experiences are merely deviations from this core. It appears then that what social interaction online entails should not be presumed but interrogated (Larkin, 2008). This study therefore aims to understand user experience in a broad sense beyond just traditional networking in order to understand the social interactions of young people online.

Uses of social media beyond content production alone.

Beyond the idea that there are multiple forms of social interaction online is the idea that social interaction online comprises more than just the production of content alone. Focusing only on produced content online, as is the case with much of the 'big data' research conducted through analysing masses of online content (Hargittai, 2015), potentially ignores the many complex uses of social media, and risks defining social media on its potential and not its actualised use in practice (Barnes, 2015). Whilst social media offers the potential for the audience create media content this does not mean that this is the only method through which users engage with and use these platforms.

Increasingly, research is beginning to consider more than just content production, and is highlighting the importance of media consumption in the social experiences of young people online. (Muller, 2012;

Springer et al., 2015). Researchers have highlighted many uses, including boredom, passing time, snooping, and celebrity 'fandom' (Lampe et al., 2008; Pempek et al., 2009). Boredom in particular has been researched (Juntti-Henriksson, 2015), which as Čičević et al. (2016) highlight may be "one of the main reasons why third year students use Facebook" (Čičević et al., 2016, 86). This broader focus beyond content production has highlighted noticeably different methods, traits, and uses when engaging with social media than have been noted through focuses upon content production alone (Lu et al., 2016). Mark et al. (2016) for example highlight that:

> "social media consumption (as opposed to production) is often lightweight, requiring little effort and often serving as a quick break. As such, it is not surprising that youth report using social media for such things as distraction, a way to fill time, and as a mechanism for socializing" (Mark et al., 2016, 5519).

This is consistent with a number of other studies (Thompson & Lougheed, 2012; Wang et al., 2015).

As Crawford (2009) points out, there is often a temptation in digital research to listen to those who speak loudly and who actively participate by producing content, but this "privileging of voice" (Crawford, 2009, 527) denies the many nuanced uses of social media beyond merely producing content, even by those who produce content who will also use social media in manners beyond this alone. When attempts to account for these uses have been made, they often serve to minimise them or place them as secondary uses (Norman et al., 2015). For example, the terms 'peripheral participants' (Zhang & Storck, 2001) and 'non-public participants' (Nonnecke & Preece, 2003) have been used to describe these users. As Crawford (2009) argues of these definitions: "they continue to define this majority group by what they are not: not public, not at the centre. As terms, they fail to offer a sense of what is being done, and why it is important to online participation" (Crawford, 2009, 527). She moves on to suggests

that accounting for more than just content production when considering social uses of social media in effect "decentres the current overemphasis on posting, commenting and 'speaking up' as the only significant forms of participation" (Crawford, 2009, 528). Similarly, other researchers have recently suggested "a wider definition of 'participation' is needed that is not limited to active contribution, but also includes the act of reading and connecting with audience contributions" (Barnes, 2015, 823).

Indeed, it has been noted that content production may actually be one of the more uncommon uses of social media (Barnes, 2015; Jones et al., 2004), and that the majority of content production may be being done by a minority of a-typical users (Bolton et al., 2013). Recent UK data finds that "a handful of users contributing extensively to the sites, whilst the majority contribute rarely or never" (Bright et al., 2014, 14). Similarly, Wu et al. (2011) highlight of Twitter posts, "50% of URLs consumed are generated by just 20K elite users" (Wu et al., 2011, 705). This highlights the importance of consumption, particularly as following celebrities has been noted as a marker of identity (Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016). It appears therefore that in order to consider the social uses of the internet by young people it is crucial that the focus of research is not upon content production alone, and that other uses are not seen as secondary or devalued. Though this produced content online is rich, obvious, and plentiful, this doesn't mean that this is the 'average' use and experience of social media (Barnes, 2015). This thesis therefore suggests that minimising the focus merely to interactions through production reduces and refracts the fullness of experiences online, and as such, the research will consider a wide range of uses beyond content production.

2.6. Conclusion.

This literature review reveals that social media is increasingly important to young people and their daily social lives (Lenhart, 2015). For many it is an important and frequent aspect of their social interactions (Absar et al., 2015; Wartella et al., 2016) and an influence upon the development of their identity (boyd, 2014; Pujazon-Zazik & Park, 2010). Importantly, their use of social media platforms is diversifying, with young people regularly present on multiple platforms (Lenhart, 2015). This range of platforms present a variety of different spaces to express and perform identity (Hodkinson, 2015), with the affordances differing from one platform to the next (Ebner et al., 2015), providing users with a variety of social uses beyond networking alone (Kowert et al., 2016). Further to this, it is apparent that to understand the social media experiences of young people there is also a need to account for the devices through which they are accessing these space. Importantly, their engagement with these spaces does not just involve producing content, but a range of other aspects that also need to be accounted for (Bolton et al., 2013). Finally, there is also a need to account for the socio-cultural background that young people bring with them to the platforms, which may change the manner in which they engage with these spaces. Given this, this research wishes to consider how young people enmesh with these platforms to produce unique user-specific and platform-bound identity performances.

It is apparent from the review of literature that many different approaches can be taken towards social media, and that defining social media can be largely problematic due to the ever changing and disruptive nature of the field (Chun, 2016). It is also apparent from this literature review that social media can be approach, understood, and experienced in a range of ways by different users (Ariel and Avidar, 2015). As such, I seek here to offer no fixed definition as to what social media is in terms specific affordances. These are likely to continue to change and diversify. Neither will I attempt to define social media via its relationship to other online media, as the differences between these categories are

increasingly porous (Curran et al., 2016). I also will not define social media via the content created on it, as this diminishes other essential roles played by users of social media (Bright et al., 2014).

Given the broad range of social media platforms, and the growing diversity of social media identified in the literature, this research will put the task of defining social media into the hands of the participants. Rather than telling participants what I am looking for in terms of social media use, I will let them tell me how they make sense of social media. This will allow me to consider on an individual basis what range of spaces they use for social interaction, and how they utilise these spaces to perform identity (Bertel, 2016). Through this technique I aim to allow the participants to show me what social media means and is to them, and also allow them to show and discuss the mediums and manners of their social actions and interactions. This is partially an attempt to capture the growing range of diverse and purposefully heterogeneous sites, but also to allow participants to show me their own definitions of 'social media' usage beyond just networking with offline contacts (Harder et al., 2016). As such, through allowing the participants to define social media, this research is able to explore how online design and user enmesh to perform identity on a specific platform-by-platform, user-by-user basis.

This literature review highlights that social uses of social media again potentially vary from user to user, and from platform to platform, and that individual approaches need to be taken into account alongside a model that considers how social action online is guided through design elements. Currently, there is a lack of research that attempts to account for and reconcile the various aspects raised in this discussion, or provide a bridge through which we can consider the many facets that shape and form interactivity online (Dyer, 2016). Though some attempts have been made to consider the effects of design upon our actions and interactions online, they have focused upon specific aspects of design (Coles & West, 2016;

Ksiazek et al., 2014) or specific platforms, often through a comparison of currently popular websites (boyd and Ellison, 2008; Lee, 2011), or specific technology (Jewitt, 2013; Papacharissi, 2011). This thesis aims to move beyond this focus upon specific aspects, instead relying upon the interpretation of the users as to what social media is to them and how they negotiate this growing range of heterogeneous platforms. As such, a model is needed that allows for individual interpretations an understandings of social media whilst also accounting for how the user's experiences of these platforms, and their subsequent actions, interactions, and identity performances (Goffman, 1959), are guided and mediated by aspects of platform specific design. Such a theoretical model will be presented in the next chapter, in which I propose the use of Comic Book Theory, a model that combines the work of Latour (2005), Barad (2003), and Goffman (1959), to unpack the relationship *between* humans and technology that result in specific and contextually-bound identity performances.

2.7. Research Questions.

This chapter has established how researchers can and have considered social media, how researchers can and have considered interactivity, and how the social emerges online through a growing and diverse/diversifying range of platforms. In the next chapter this thesis will examine research and theory that discusses what affects identity performance online, first broadly considering identity performativity, then more specifically looking at researchers who have looked at the effect of design upon social action and interaction. In order to understand identity, we must assess the wealth of literature discussing social identity formation and presentation. An overview of this area will be presented in the next chapter, with a specific focus upon combining a focus upon identity performance with a focus upon the role of design. We will consider Goffman, Latour, Barad, and Comic Book Studies to epistemologically position this study.

Against the background raised in this literature review, this research aims to trace online social identity performances displayed on social media as a combination of personal understanding and input, and the effects of design and modal affordances. In particular, this thesis aims to focus upon how these identity performances are co-constructed and shaped by many aspects of social media including design and personal understanding. The literature review highlights that this is an understanding of social media that is currently lacking from the extant literature, and that an understanding is needed that accounts for the growing diversity of social media platforms (Lenhart, 2015). Given the range of social media platforms available, and the continued use of multiple platforms by a majority of users (Lenhart, 2015), this thesis aims to examine how identity performances online arise and are shaped for and by the affordances of each specific platform. Also, given the shifting nature of social media, an understanding of how users makes sense of and understand social media is needed. This research consequently aims to see how the participants define and delineate social media, and how the negotiate the growing diversity of media platforms online. To summarise, this thesis aims to explore how specific iterations of user, technology, context, and design result in specific identity performances; in different actions, interactions, and perceptions online. This research will do so by looking at how identities, actions, and perceptions of a group of young people are both constructed and constrained across their use of a set of contemporary social media platforms and the various technologies that provide access to these sites. From this, several key research questions emerge:

1) How are the online identity performances, actions, and interactions of a group of 17-25 year olds on online social media platforms co-constructed and negotiated by the interactions between the user, the technologies they use to access these sites, and the sites themselves?

2) What role do the specific media forms and designs of social media play in mediating, and/or control identity and action online; are there resistances/strategies against this?

3) How do individual users understand, manage, and importantly negotiate their identities, their interactions, and their actions online?

4) How are these identity performances accessed and maintained online, and how does the device through which they're accessed affect the use of social media for social action and interaction?

5) How do participants understand, define, and negotiate social media?

Chapter 3 - Theory

3.1. Introduction.

The previous chapter presented a review of relevant literature around social interaction through social media, and concluded with the proposal of several research questions aimed at exploring how social media users negotiate a growing plethora of online social spaces to perform identity, enmeshing with the platform design and the technology through which they are accessing these spaces. This chapter will now proceed to outline the theoretical framework for this research. Given that the focus is upon how identity is performed in and through these platforms, this chapter will begin by exploring the concept of identity as it pertains to the research questions and aims.

Identity is such a frequently used term that it has become ambiguous and heterogeneous, and perhaps even over-utilised. Despite the diversity and extensiveness of literature discussing the concept of identity, or perhaps because of the breadth of this research, researchers have suggested that it is still a concept that is poorly understood, and frequently under-conceptualised (Buckingham, 2008). Yet identity is a topic that nonetheless is particularly pertinent given the rise and proliferation of social media, and the connections discussed in literature review between social media and identity (boyd, 2014; Kietzmen et al., 2012).

Given that the purpose of this study is to explore how specific users and platforms enmesh to create specific identity performances, for the purpose of this research this project must consider identity less from an inner understanding of self-conceptualisation (Rogers, 1961) and instead focus on the ways in

which user identity is actualised[3]; how it is realised and expressed externally. In essence, this project will consider the effects the specific situation has upon the identities social media users present, and how the creation of location specific narratives are negotiated. As such, this research's approach towards identity will be focusing upon social performances, social actions, and social interactions, given for and to a variety of audiences (Goffman, 1959). These social identities will be considered as negotiated in, and emerging from, a variety of social media platforms.

In the following sections of this chapter, therefore, I will focus on discussing definitions and theories of identity that best relate to the research aims and research questions of this thesis. Following this, the chapter will move on to consider how best to account for the role of design in shaping identity performances, looking at the issues raised by Actor-Network Theory (Latour, 2005) and Barad's (2003, 2007) work in agential realism, before considering how the ideas raised in the field of Comic Book Studies can help this research address how individual narratives of identity are created by the enmeshing of a particular platform with an individual user.

3.2. Understanding identity.

Within the field of sociology, the focus of identity research generally shifts from relationship between self and identity towards a focus on the relationship between identity and the social situations and settings in which it is formed and enacted (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000; Goffman, 1959; Hall, 1992). However, there is still much variation within this focus in regards to the conceptualisation of social

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[3] 'Actualised' in this content means broadly how identity is presented and projected externally, through clothes, speech, movement, actions, interactions, and many other markers of identity (Goffman, 1959). Rather than considering inner categorizations, a focus upon actualisation will essentially look at how we act and interact socially (Burr, 2015).

identity. Given the variety and breadth of the discussion surrounding the concept of identity, this section seeks to briefly discuss some of the manners in which identity has been conceptualized in sociology in order to position the approach taken by this research.

A key and popular sociological approach to identity has been the use of large-scale 'macro' group identities to explain social action and interaction (Giddens, 1991; Shilling, 1992). Such an understanding attempts to conceptualise identity as a broad cultural category that is tantamount to the ethos of a group of people (Nagel, 1995; Scheff, 1994). This macro-focus portrays identity as being synonymous with broad social categories such as ethnicity and sexuality, and as such attempts to record and understand identity as it pertains to memberships of broad social categories.

Whilst such a conceptualisation of identity has provided many useful discussions, especially around the field of identity politics (Cudd, 2006; Pateman & Mills, 2007), this conceptualisation nonetheless misses the importance and the theoretical necessity of the separation of the notion of identity as a distinct concept from social categories (Stryker & Burke, 2000), allowing for individual variation and variety (Bucholtz, 1999; Johnstone, 1996). As Bucholtz and Hall (2005:585) point out "identities encompass macro-level demographic categories, temporary and interactionally specific stances and participant roles, and local, ethnographically emergent cultural positions". In other words, whilst macro categories and Discourses do shape how we categorise ourselves, these same broad brush-stroke categories are not capable of accounting for the complexities in individual behaviours and patterns (Bybee & Hopper, 2001; Fenstermaker & West, 2002). Though macro categories do help researchers understand certain choices within social spaces, "their actual manifestation in practice is dependent on the interactional demands of the immediate social context" (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, 591). This is an important insight for

this research as a key aim is to account for the importance of social context, drawing particular attention to variation in design across contexts. A model is therefore needed that positions identity as malleable and responsive to context.

Attempting to account for these individual variations, symbolic interactionalist such as Stryker (1980) have presented an approach that considers the individual, focusing upon how social groups affect the social actions of individuals, rather than generalising across broad groups and organisations (Burke & Stets, 2009). This approach aims to highlight identity as the social actions that emerge from the relationship *between* the individual and society as an individual gains feedback from social groups to their actions and begins to adapt their behaviour patterns (Stryker, 1980). As such, social groups provide the lens through which individual contextualise their social roles, adopting mannerisms in order to meet the group's social expectations (McCall & Simmons, 1978). Identity is therefore viewed as emerging from, and reflective of, the social setting it emerges in, as the social group causes the individual to adapt their actions, potentially suppressing their individual variations (Stryker, 1980).

Whilst this does provide a useful conceptualisation of the broader effects of situation upon social interaction, such an approach again focuses upon group influence (Fine, 1993), placing identity as the loss of individual variation in the search of group conformity (Burbank & Martins, 2010). Whilst the literature review established the need to consider broad social categories influencing social interaction online, it was also apparent that there is a need to consider individual engagements with these online spaces (Nash, 2012), and importantly to looking at identity variation and adaptability across a plethora of platforms (Ariel & Avidar, 2015).Given that online platforms are specific in their design, there is a need to consider identity as malleable and bound to specific locations, not just as the result of

consistent exposure to broad social groups. Given that the symbolic interactionalist approach does not adequately account for identity variations across different locations (Blok & Jensen, 2011), such an approach will not be suitable to consider the nuances of locationally-emergent online social actions.

One further approach that attempts to subvert the top-down approach to identity is Social Identity Theory (Abrams, 1999; Brown, 2000), which approaches identity from the individual's conceptualisation of the social, and understands identity as the personal adoption of broad social traits to gain affiliation to particular groups (Tajfel, 1982). Drawing from the field of psychology, this approach attempts to account for the adoption of group behaviours by focusing upon the individual's "self-categorization and social comparison" (Stets & Burke, 2000, 225), moving away from the focus upon the cumulative effects of exposure to social group, as seen in symbolic interactionalism (McCall & Simmons, 1978). Social interactions are thus formed through an individual's perception of meaningful social groups and their expectations (Lewis, 1990; Roger, 1961). Again however, whilst this approach does allow for a consideration of how identity is negotiated by the individual, the literature review suggests an approach towards identity presentation online needs to be both user-specific *and* location-specific. As such an approach is still needed that allows for an account of how identity varies situationally.

The social understandings of identity presented in the theories above provide a useful frame for a consideration of identity online, especially given the social and often group-based nature of online actions and interactions (Spears & Postmes, 2015; Sundar, 2015). They all also raise some interesting points in regards to the adoption of social actions for particular settings, namely that our identity is drawn from our understanding of, and exposure to, the social situation around us, which we then use to self-categorise and adjust our mannerisms, actions, and interactions (Turner et al., 1987) in line with the

behaviour of others (Stryker 1980), a process referred to as 'social comparison' (Festinger, 1954). Though this provides a useful consideration for the social nature of identity, the general focus of attention and analysis present through these theories is upon how individual agency is coerced by the individuals' membership to certain social groups. However, research has shown many other aspects that can affect our actions and interactions beyond these broad social aspects alone (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). As discussed in the literature review, an approach towards identity is needed that positions identity as a complex, and crucially, more malleable and responsive performance, specific and adaptive to the setting in which the social interactions take place, and able to account for individual variation. This research wishes to pay particular attention to the manner in which identity performance is adapted for, and crucially, adapted *by* the specific platforms the user is interacting and acting on, in, and though, on a platform-by-platform basis. Therefore, whilst these frameworks provide a useful understanding of socially performed identity, in order to examine how social actions and interactions are effected on a platform-by-platform basis, a framework is needed that centres the focus on situationally adaptive performances. The approach adopted in this research therefore draws its understanding of identity from the dramaturgical approach of Erving Goffman (1959).

3.3. Goffman, dramaturgy, and fluid identity performances.

The word identity comes from the Latin root *idem*, meaning 'the same', yet identity is often viewed as a sign of independence and difference; a consistent point of reference that makes each of us unique. Whilst the theories discussed in the previous section lean into the idea of a consistent identity (Jenkins, 2014), Goffman and his work in dramaturgical identity subverts this to look at the existence of multiple malleable identities consisting of external performances given in and as a response to specific locations and situations (Farnham & Churchill, 2011; Firth, 2013)*.* In essence, Goffman suggests we choose

appropriate social cues, actions, and interactions available for us to taper for different settings and audiences. Therefore, rather than focusing upon a consistent identity as the unit of measurement against an inner notion of self (Stets & Burke, 2000), Goffman suggests instead we treat identity as a variable (Bertel, 2016), responsive to, and appropriate for, a given situation (Pearson, 2009). For Goffman then, identity is socially created, and crucially is plural, changeable, and responsive to a given location (Anderson, 1994; Lemert & Branaman, 1997). This approach therefore provides a useful frame when considering, as this research aims to, the effect of a given situation on social actions and interactions, in that it allows for a view of identity that situationally bound, socially contingent, and malleable (Rueda-Ortiz & Giraldo, 2016).

Given this positioning, Goffman posits in his key text, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) that the primary focus of analysis should be upon interactions and exchanges between the performer and an audience. Goffman defines and discusses identity performances as 'all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period…before a set of observers and which has some influence on the observers" (Goffman, 1959, 32). The key component here is the notion of *audience* (Bertel, 2016). For Goffman, identity performance was something that occurred before, in response to, and for an audience; performers give their performances for the audience in order to influence them in some manner. The audience play a part in the performance by providing feedback, by judging the authenticity of the performance, and by providing the frame by which the performer approached the performance (Goffman, 1959). This also allows for the ongoing adaptation of the specific identity performance, as Goffman suggested that performances proceed in line with the feedback provided by the audience (Uimonen, 2013). Whereas the theorists discussed in the previous section of this chapter highlighted the relationships between self and society as somewhat of a constant, Goffman instead looked at the

concept of changeability and adaptability in the manners in which we act and interact based upon the social situations in which we are engaging.

Goffman's approach therefore holds that we cannot separate social interaction and action from the specific social situation in and through which it emerges (Dyer, 2015), and that identity manifests itself through our actions within that situation (Goffman, 1959). This, as mentioned in the literature review, makes Goffman's framework popular for studying social media as social media data commonly largely consists of user-produced interactions[4]. Given that Goffman positions identity performance as a response to specific situation, these social actions and interactions are not positioned as innate qualities of the user in-and-of themselves, but are considered as chosen for their appropriateness for the specific audience and situation (Elliot, 2008). Goffman, however, does not specify where the performer's awareness of the appropriate forms of social behaviours comes from (Schwalbe, 1993). This may in part be due to the purposeful shift in focus of his analysis, which was upon the performances themselves as units for evaluation and not upon the individual as a performer of identity. Through this ontological shift, Goffman attempts to execute a pivot away from an introspective understanding of identity, characteristic of psychological approaches (Lewis, 1990), and instead moves towards an understandings of identity as the performance of social actions and interactions given to a specific audience (Markus & Wurf, 1987).

In this manner, Goffman purposefully avoids commenting upon actual 'self' identity, which he viewed as an entirely separate issue to socially performed actions and interactions, joined only through the use of the same nomenclature (Hitlin, 2003). This position is so strong that Goffman (1963) purposefully

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[4]   Although, as also mentioned in the literature review, an account of social media also needs to consider more than just content production alone (Čičević et al., 2016).

distinguishes three focuses upon identity; 'social', the external actions and interactions of an individual; 'personal', the assumption of an individual's demarcation as an individual separate from others, often applied through the use of a name; and 'ego identity', a term signifying some sense of personal conceptualisation (Anderson, 1994). Goffman asserted that these were largely separate and that his focus remained squarely upon the first two categories alone (Goffman, 1963). Despite criticism (Gouldner, 1970; Scheff, 2001), Goffman purposefully chose not to focus upon the internal aspect of identity. As such, Goffman's approach does not claim to discuss or account for the entire experience or notion of identity. Instead, he is attempting to understand a specific aspect of identity, namely, how we adapt our presentations for the given social situation, much as this research aims to do. As Goffman himself put it:

> *"All the world is not a stage – certainly the theatre isn't entirely. (Whether you organize a theatre or an aircraft factory, you need to find places for cars to park and coats to be checked, and these had better be real places, which, incidentally had better carry real insurance against theft)"* (Goffman, 1974, 1).

Whilst such an approach therefore lacks consideration of where the skill resources to conduct such performances come from, Goffman's approach does present a usable framework for considering the effects of situation upon variations in performances of identity. Nonetheless, the review of literature carried out in Chapter 2 also highlights that beyond the effect of situation alone, there is a need to acknowledge the role of the individual and their stylistic choices in these social actions and interactions (Meier & Pentzold, 2011). This thesis therefore holds that an account can be provided of some of the broader and personal elements that play a role in an individual's understanding of appropriate

presentations of identity, a reconciliation of which can be provided through Comic Book Theory presented at the end of this chapter.

Goffman's approach is not the only framework that provides a focus upon multiple iterations of identity. Stryker (1980) and others in the field of Symbolic Interactionalism also conceive of identity as potentially multiple, ranking any variation in identity against their deviation from a core notion of 'self' (McCall & Simmons, 1978; Burke & Stets, 2009). For Symbolic Interactionalism, the focus of analysis is upon the relationship between core inner understandings of self, and the needs, rules, and expectations of the social situations into which the individual is entered, with identity emerging from the interplay between these elements. Goffman however again decentres and removes the focus of analysis away from the self and focuses upon the audience and situation as the key concepts in the performance (Farnham & Churchill, 2011). As such, Goffman rejects the concept of ranking performances against other performances, instead ranking their success not against consistency but situational suitability (Longmore, 1998). Through this framing, Goffman purposefully shifts the focus towards studying each eventuality as it happens, in situ, thereby assessing how the performance meets the social needs of the given situation and audience (Longmore, 1998). Goffman thereby differentiates himself from the field of Symbolic Interactionalism by removing the focus upon deviations from a core self (Gonos, 1977). For the purpose of this study, this key differentiation provides the ideal frame to consider how identity performances, and thereby social actions and interactions, are given for a particular situation, with the social situations viewed as the catalyst for the given identity performance.

Nonetheless, some have criticised Goffman's more fluid understanding of identity performances by suggesting that such a contingent notion is ersatz, and that there is somewhat of a lack of authenticity in

the notion of performed identity (Gouldner, 1970; Young & Welsh, 1990). Goffman's positioning however negates the need for the focus of analysis to be upon a notion of authenticity and indeed, questions the notion of what could be considered authentic through proposing that any performance is judged every time by a potentially different audience. The multiple and fluid nature of identity performance that is the focus of Goffman's work does not mean that identity performance is in-authentic, or deceitful, but merely that it is adaptive to the social situation as is necessary (Bertel, 2016; Evans, 2015). Applying the notion of authenticity is an attempt to tie a value judgement to correct identity performance, suggesting that some performances that vary greatly from others lack a degree of authenticity. Goffman's approach however completely rejects this premise, instead suggesting that a performance is successful if it has met the needs of the audience and if it is appropriate for the social situation in which it is performed (Farnham & Churchill, 2011; Frith, 2013), not if it is consistent against a base level.

Goffman's approach to identities as such positions them as 'fluid' (Dunn, 2000). They are not fixed, isolated, or self-contained, but are instead fragmented, multiple, heterogeneous, socially bound, and adaptable (Stryker, 1980). However, this distinction does seem difficult to reconcile to the notion of inner identity, particularly when both discussions are using the same term to discuss often different phenomena that do not necessarily have to be in competition (McAdams, 1997). Indeed, perhaps, as highlighted earlier, the term identity has become muddied, over-wrought, and over-used as the topic has been approached from such a wide variety of approaches. It is clear however that Goffman does not claim to speak for the entire experience of identity, as he himself points out (Goffman, 1963). However, to avoid confusion and in order to draw focus towards the performative nature of identity examined in this study, this thesis will use the term 'identity performance' in order to discuss the performance of

social actions and interactions within given social situation, and acknowledge that this is a curation of appropriate actions and interactions, not a core notion of self.

As detailed fully in Chapter 2, this focus upon malleability in terms of how we act and interact in social situations seems particularly suited to contemporary internet interactions as researchers have observed users with multiple changeable and adaptable identity performances aimed at and for the increasing variety of changeable audiences (Davis, 2016; Lyu, 2016) and platforms (Lenhart, 2015) online. It is suggested that "the reality of users' lived experiences is that most users incorporate multiple platforms into their communication practices in order to access the people and networks they desire to influence" (Zhao et al., 2016:1). This can lead to a wider variety of situationally-bound performances online. For example, Pearce and Vitak (2015) describe the ways in which Azerbaijani youth negotiate the multiple audiences they have access to online, and how they balance this with the 'honour' culture they are surrounded with offline, noting the potential freedom afforded by a wider audience online.

The specific situations presented online however raise some issues in terms of how users present themselves to multiple audiences and how users deal with the shifting multiple identity performances. Varis and Blommaert (2015) for example note that the growth of viral social media posts online suggests that social actors cannot often account for all possible audiences online, leading to potentially 'looser' performances of identity online. Similar observations have been made in regards to 'context collapse' and multiple converging audiences online (Utz, 2015). Richey et al. (2016) note that the changeable nature of identity can be potentially problematic in certain situations online when situational cues are misread, leading to inappropriate posts which can damage identity impressions. They note, "technology-

enabled interactions don't constitute a perfect situation where performers can access a full range of social cues" (Richey et al., 2016, 604).

However, whilst Goffman's work allows for a consideration of how identity is responsive and specific to situation, it crucially doesn't look at the role of the design of that situation in shaping the identity performances. Goffman does note that we choose appropriate social cues, actions, and interactions for different settings and audiences, but does not overtly consider in any detail that this choice is not boundless, made instead from the available options within that location. This is a particularly important factor to account for. For example, Richey et al. (2016) highlight a number of technological factors that may affect how users present identity, particularly highlighting the speed and ease of access as factors that may affect how and why users interact online. Others have similarly highlighted design choices such as a-synchronicity as factors that may affect how we choose to present ourselves online for a range of audiences (Hogan, 2010). The effect of design and technological factors is a theme that we will return to later when we discuss Actor-Network Theory and other theoretical frames that help unpack the effects of design, but it is apparent that whilst Goffman's work can aid a consideration in terms of how the audience affects performances of identity, his framework does not fully account for the effects of the design and the layout of the stage in and upon which the performances take place. It also crucially provides little-to-no attempt to unpack identity beyond performed social action, an issue that, as highlighted in the literature review, needs to be considered given that research suggests the majority of users utilise social media for more than just content production alone (Mark et al., 2016). Nonetheless, the dramaturgical approach appears particularly useful for the flexible nature of online interactions as it holds that we must view identity as multiple, changeable, and performative, with the emphasis of analysis upon the responsiveness to the situation.

As such, and following the work of Goffman (1959, 1963), this thesis similarly frames identity as malleable and adaptive to the specific situation and environment in which it emerges, but additionally aims to account for how the design of this situation affects the specific performances that emerges. As discussed in Chapter 2, a number of other factors must be accounted for when considering why users of social media interact and act in the manner they do online. In particular, the socio-cultural resources of the user were noted as a factor that may affect how they actualise social interaction and utilise available features (Haimson et al., 2016; Rubin & McClelland, 2015). In order to account for these socio-cultural factors, this chapter will now move on to consider the field of post-structuralism (Foucault, 1980), an approach towards understanding social structures and situations that is often combined with Goffman's work when considering interactions online (Koole, 2014; Lovink, 2013) and offline (Cahill, 2000; Ytreberg, 2002), before moving on to consider how best to account for the role of the physical design of the staging upon our social actions and interactions.

Accounting for situation in identity performances: Foucault and the importance of situation.

Given the notion that identity performance can be thought of as fluid and changeable through the use of the dramaturgical model, the question then becomes, what changes identity performances? For Goffman (1959) the answer to this question was that it was audience, and in particular the individual performer's conceptualisation of that audience, that changed how individuals approach and shape identity performances (Bertel, 2016). Given that Goffman's dramaturgical approach focuses heavily upon how identity performances are tapered to meet the needs of the audience and to therefore comply with social conventions and expectations, Goffman's work rather frequently finds itself tied with

the epistemological stance of post-structuralism and the works of Michael Foucault (Hacking, 2004; Jenkins, 2008), whose focus was upon how the social structures shape, influence, and mediate the behaviours of society.

For Foucault (1980), our knowledge and definition of the world around us was not arbitrary and static but rather purposeful, flexible, and worthy of interrogation. Inspired by Kant's (1998) attempts to present the reality of the world around us (noumenon) as a separate notion from how we thought of the world (phenomenon), Foucault's work considered that we were not merely labelling and representing the objective world around us with discourse, and instead considered how knowledge of the world around us could be a method of social control or of social power (Hendricks, 2008). Foucault (1980) thus suggested that the manner in which we understand and know the social world around us, and thus how we act and interact within that world, is informed by the intimate and constantly shifting relationship between 'power' and 'knowledge'.

Foucault therefore studied how knowledge of the world around us was constructed and used to maintain power (Hartsock, 1990). He attempted to unpack how these conceptions of reality, or 'Discourses' as he termed them (Foucault, 1980), were constructed and maintained, what this construction revealed about those who work to maintain this particular knowledge of the world, and how these constructed conceptions of the world work to maintain certain social ideals and standards (Miller, 1990). He argued that we understand the world through the terms and ideas we use to define it, and that the manner with which we define and know the people, things, and concepts around us was constructed and maintained by the power structures and institutions (Crampton & Elden, 2007). These constructed categorisations of the world around us in turn often serve to enforce and maintain the

claims to power of those within the structures of power, allowing them to maintain their control of discursive knowledge (Fox, 2000). For Foucault (1980) the relationship between power and knowledge was cyclical; knowledge maintained and legitimised the power structures, which in turn controlled and constrained knowledge (Delanty, 2000).

Foucault suggested therefore that these Discourses are not static; they are malleable and act as frames through which we understand and know the world at a given time (Cronin, 1996). Given that Discourses "systematically construct the subjects and the worlds of which they speak" (Lessa, 2006, 283). A post-structuralist definition of Discourse holds that they are temporally bound and that:

> "*Discourse is not a disembodied collection of statements, but a grouping of utterances or sentences; statements which are enacted within a social context, which are determined by that social context, and which contribute to the way that social context continues its existence*"(Mills, 1997, 10).

Discourses then are socially constructed and reveal the ideological beliefs and social expectations of a period in time; they define, control, and become an accepted way of acting, looking, thinking, knowing, and speaking about a subject at a given moment in time (Rowse, 2005).

Importantly, Discourses are not only our way of knowing, understanding, and framing the world (Pennycook, 1994), they also work to shape our experiences, actions, and interactions within the world (Bernal, 2002; Hacking, 2004; Scollon, 1998). Discourses are manifested in our words, and also our thoughts and actions within the world around us, which further serve to reinforce and support the claims to 'truth' of these Discourses (Hacking, 2004). As Miller and Fox (1997:36) argue, Discourse

shapes possibilities which people "use in conducting their everyday activities and interactions". Further to this, and importantly for this research, this means Discourses can also manifest themselves in the physical world around us, and can be visual and spatial (Diez, 1999; Fairclough, 2001). Foucault provided an example of this in his work on the penal system, in which he pointed out not only the prevalence of legal, juridical, and medical Discursive narratives present within the penal system, but also the embodiment of Discourses of control in the physical design of the prisons themselves. Foucault highlighted in particular the Panopticon, a system designed by Jeremy Bentham in the late 18th century to maximise surveillance and to elicit compliant behaviour in monitored prisoners who were always potentially monitored from a centralised tower around which the cells were located. Foucault suggested that the Panopticon was a system which could act as a metaphor to reflect the control of social behaviour in the real world in which we begin to self-regulate our behaviour (Caluya, 2010; Foucault, 1977), but also highlighted the physical design of the panopticon as a method of eliciting certain preferable actions amongst inmates who could potentially be viewed at any time, and thus began regulated themselves (Crampton & Elden, 2007). Using the panoptic model Foucault highlighted that physical spaces can embody Discourses and can be used to enforce and reinforce certain behaviours, social actions, interactions, and power structures (Crampton & Elden, 2007). As Diez (1999:603) argues "'we' do not act as autonomous subjects but from a 'subject position' made available by the discursive context in which we are situated". Or, as Markus and Cameron (2002:16) argue, "the constructions of reality which are made apparent in Discourse will very often be apparent in the way a building organises space". This has been noted by a number of researchers in buildings such as shopping malls (Voyce, 2006) and libraries (Radford, 1992).

The same may therefore be true of social media platforms, which in their design may suggest certain manners of acting and interacting. Foucault's understanding of Discourses has been used to explore how

users act and interact online, guided by an understanding of offline expectations and Discourses which manifest themselves in the new mediums and modes present online (Callaghan & Lazard, 2012; Mowlabocus, 2012). Winokur (2007) for example looked at how avatars are affected by offline Discourses of beauty and acceptable body image, a fact that has also been noted of 'selfies' (Oakley, 2016). Similarly, Jowett, when studying expressions of sexuality online, notes that there are "ways in which power relations can manifest themselves in such online forums in ways that are exclusionary" (Jowett, 2015, 295). Similarly, Callaghan & Lazard (2012) track the way that Discourses around breastfeeding practises in public perpetuate in discussions on dedicated online forums.

Foucault and Goffman.

Discourse then is a medium through which power is expressed, and people, actions, identities, spaces, and practises are defined and governed (Foucault, 1972). This can be critical to an understanding of identity using a dramaturgical frame, as Discourses can be seen as informing and shaping the manners and methods through which individuals are interacting (Lovink, 2013), and can frame the performer's and audiences' understanding of appropriate identity performances and social conventions (Bordo, 1993). Regarding identity, Foucault suggests:

> *"The individual is not to be conceived as a sort of elementary nucleus, a primitive atom, a multiple and inert material on which power comes to fasten or against which it happens to strike... In fact, it is already one of the prime effects of power that certain bodies, certain gestures, certain Discourses, certain desires, come to be identified and constituted as individuals. The individual, that is, is not the vis-a-vis of power; it is I believe, one of its prime effects"* (Foucault, 1980, 98).

Here Foucault is arguing that there is no core inherent human characteristic that controls our social interactions and identity performances. Instead, human actions, interactions, and identity performances are a product of the existing Discourses they are exposed to, and are a product of their society at any given time. In a similar manner to Goffman (1959), Foucault throws into question the notion of a singular core identity or self (Lovink, 2013), instead attempting to understand why it is we believe there is a self. Through this line of questioning Foucault comes to the conclusion that the self is the result of the social spaces and situations an individual finds him or herself in, and the Discourses they are individually exposed to. In essence, Foucault manages to account for the socio-cultural positioning of the individual in regards to how they approach and realise social action and interaction, an aspect of social interaction online that this research is keen to account for.

Given this positioning it is easy to see the overlap between Goffman (1959) and Foucault (1980). It is through this understanding of identity and human interaction that we can begin to see how the Discourses we are exposed to will make a difference in how we frame our social actions and interactions (Hacking, 2004). We can also begin to consider that if Discourses manifest themselves in the physical layout and design of the world around us, then the design of the social spaces and technologies around us can also influence how we are able to act and interact socially. Goffman and Foucault however provide no framework to specifically examine the design of social spaces upon the manner in which we socially act and interact, and as such, a further shift is needed towards a framework that purposefully examines the identity performances that come from the enmeshing of design with socio-cultural and discursively bound individuals.

The overlap between Foucault and Goffman's work can be seen in the manner in which Goffman deals in part with the important role of societal Discourses. Goffman states that an individual performer does not create their own meaningful performance but that "when the individual presents himself before others, his performance will tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of society" (Goffman, 1959, 45). As such, the individual's performance will be framed by an understanding of social ideals, both by the performer and by the audience. Goffman and others from the dramaturgical school propose that performers are aware of social conventions and behaviours, and can adapt the performance in accordance with, or even to flout, these expectations (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006; Tracy & Trethewey, 2005). These social actions and interactions then also serve to reinforce future expectancy of these behaviours, strengthening and reinforcing the Discourse of acceptable behaviours and actions (Hancock & Garner, 2011). Thus, Discourses are also manifested in our actions and interactions given and chosen for specific audiences (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005).

Goffman (1995) himself highlighted the cyclical nature between social convention and performance, through which performers meet social expectations, in turn strengthening the legitimacy and expectation of these actions. Goffman pointed out that social ideals served to inform behaviour, which in turn served to strengthen the legitimacy and normalcy of these behaviours. He stated that social categories and conventions severed to "establish the means of categorising persons and the complement of attributes felt to be ordinary and natural for members of each of these categories" (Goffman, 1995, 503). As such, these categories work to inform and permeate our performances, and our performances work to strengthen the social ideals and discourses of normative social behaviour (Hacking, 2004). Goffman's work therefore focuses its analysis of identity upon the external and projected performance, and views identity as action and interaction that is informed by, and in turn, informs social concepts and Discourses (Denzin, 2001; Markham, 2013). The emphasis for the

dramaturgical approach is therefore upon understanding how meanings and behaviours of identity are socially bound (Collinson, 2003) and suitable for the specific given situation (White, 1992), with research suggesting the meaning of social signs and cues (Brisset & Edgley, 1975) shift and change based upon location (Gillen, 2014).

In this vein, other research has combined Foucault and Goffman to consider how online interaction is negotiated, constrained and shaped by a number of factors (Jarvis, 2011; Koole, 2014). Willett (2008) for example attempts to unpack the manner in which agency and power is negotiated online. She notes for example the trend of girls dressing virtual dolls that "positions girls as sexual, as needing to be skinny, and as constant consumers of fashion and accessories" (Willett, 2008, 49). She concludes by suggesting that "that young people's online identities must be viewed not only in terms of active engagement, but also in relation to the structures which frame those activities" (Willett, 2008, 65).

Applying Foucault's work to Goffman's understanding of identity then allows this research to consider how an individual's action and interactions within a given environment are guided by their socio-cultural background and by the current Discourses prevalent in their lives, an aspect that the review of literature in Chapter 2 noted as important when approaching online interaction. This is especially pertinent for the research being presented here given that Discourses are also physically and spatially grounded and specific, with design drawing on and enforcing specific aspects of offline and pre-existing ideals (Buckingham & Willett, 2013; Hacking, 2004). As Couldry suggests, when considering interactions within a space we must acknowledge "the spatially specific *accumulations* of 'constraints' and 'coercions' on action that flow from human life being lived in coordination or competition with others" (Couldry, 2012, 26-27). By this, Couldry suggests that our actions and interactions within a space are often constrained

and guided by a number of accumulated factors specific to that location. A reading of the internet as a

space for social interaction can therefore consider how our actions and interactions are coerced and

constrained within a given environment. Different spaces and sites can be considered as emhasising

different Discourses and methods of socializing (Hook, 2005), meaning that platforms must be

considered in an individual and specific manner whilst still accounting for the user's understanding of,

and expose to, larger social structures, powers, and Discourses. As Hook (2005) suggests, researcher

utilising Foucault's work should attempt to consider what make "certain acts, statements and subjects

possible at certain specific locations" (Hook, 2005, 10).

 As such a framework is needed that allows for the impact of specific location design along with a

potentially deeper understanding of both the systemic structures and logics of the particular media

culture, as well as the individual interpretations and realisations of identity of by individual agents.

Given this, this chapter will now move on to look at how best to account for the effects of the specific

platforms upon, in, and through which identity performances emerge, first considering if and how

Goffman can be used to account for and conceptualise the notion of space and place.

Goffman and space, accounting for the role of physicality in identity performances.

Goffman's focus when analysing identity was often squarely upon the effect of the audience on the

social performance of identity (Ytreberg, 2002). Whilst we have so far in this chapter accounted for the

manner in which identity can be framed as situationally specific and grounded in the socio-cultural

exposure of the performer (Foucault, 1980), there is a need to account or the manner in which identity

performance is affected by the physical reality and design of the specific situation, not just enacted upon

it. Though Goffman accounted for the effects of the audience upon a performance, he did not adequately account for other aspects that may affect the performance of identity, particularly, as Bullingham and Vasconcelos (2013) point out, aspects that have arisen since the rise of social media. In particular, this research is keen to extend Goffman's ideas on the performative nature of identity to not only consider the effects of the audience upon a situationally specific performance of identity by a socio-culturally grounded actor, but to also account for the effects of the specific 'staging' and 'props' available to the actor. 'Staging' and 'props' here are used as an extension of Goffman's performative analogy of identity. 'Staging' can best be thought of as the physical design and layout of the spaces in which performers are acting and interacting, and 'props' can be thought of as the tools, modes, and accoutrement made available to the actors to aid the performances in a variety on manners. A purposeful focus upon staging and props has been chosen to account for the effects of space and design upon our performances, and to allow for a robust approach towards the research questions laid out in the previous chapter.

One of Goffman's key papers on the subject of social analysis was entitled 'The Neglected Situation' (1964). Though he was talking about the subject of the analysis of face-to-face interactions against other methods of communication, this title aptly sums up his treatment of the role of the physical setting in identity performance; neglected. Research suggests that the physical settings in which identity performances take place provide a location for the performer to perform in, on, and with, and contain props to potentially amplify, minimize, or extended aspects of our identity performance (Gieryn, 2000; Huot & Rudman, 2010). As laid out in the research question, it is these elements that will form part of the focus of this thesis, and therefore a theoretical frame is needed that allows for a thorough exploration of the effects of these elements and their role in the formation and presentation of situationally specific online identity performances.

Despite often not accounting adequately for the impact of staging and props upon identity performances, Goffman was however aware of the potential impact of situation upon identity performances, and did acknowledge and account for the presence of staging and props in a performance. In particular, Goffman acknowledged the role of 'setting' which he defined as including "furniture, décor, and physical layout" (Goffman, 1959, 32). For Goffman however, these objects merely served as tools through which the performer could augment their performance, rather than objects that affected and changed the performance (Rettie, 2009). These were objects that were chosen and picked backstage by the performer and as such they were used by the performer for a number of performative functions (Hjorth, 2011). Goffman thus portrays objects as tools through which a performer could communicate, supplement, and reinforce the performance they were giving to the audience (Schulz, 2012). Critically, Goffman does not continue on to acknowledge that these props that the actor chooses from are often not limitless but are also often situationally specific (Stroud et al., 2016), and that the manner in which staging and props are arranged could possibly augment and affect the performer and their performance (Perinbanayagam, 1990). Whilst Goffman considers how the audience differs from location to location (Goffman, 1959; Hjorth, 2011), he does not however consider how the availability and range of props may also change from location to location (Di Domenico & Lynch, 2007). For Goffman, this interaction between performer and setting was a one-way relationship with the performer using the props and staging, but without the staging and props impacting the performer and their performance (McNeill, 1991). Goffman presents the performer therefore as being in control over the objects and space around them, rather than viewing identity performance as arising from the interplay *between* staging and performer.

If we return to Foucault's ideas about design embodying Discourse, it is important to note that, in part, the props we have available to pick from are chosen for us online (Dabbagh et al., 2016), a point that appears more pertinent given the growing range of platforms (Zhao et al., 2016). Some platforms purposefully limit the choice of props, for example, Twitter's 140 character limit (Schultz et al., 2011), or Snapchat's use of image filters (Chopra-Gant, 2016). As such, online users do not have a limitless range of props to utilise, but a curated set from which to choose. As Bennett and Bennett (1981:18) stated, "all social interaction is affected by the physical container in which it occurs". That the actor chooses the props then is only partially true; the actor chooses the props from those available to them in the particular setting they find themselves. This is a crucial difference that this thesis aims to overtly account for in order to understand the effects of design upon our actions and interactions on a platform-by-platform basis.

Law and Moser (1999) further attempt to complicate the relationship between actors and props, highlighting that we should not so quickly draw a division between people and props, and that the relationship between these aspects should not be considered a one-way relationship. They note that:

> *"Goffman's division between people and props - which is also one built into much social and organisational analysis as well as common sense – insists that it is people who act rather than objects. But in our way of thinking…the division does not work and the division between people and their surroundings has become blurred"* (Law & Mosser, 1999, 253).

As such, Law and Mosser suggest it is often impossible to separate a performance from the situation in which it arises, which is often integral to the particular manifestation of identity. It appears then that the relationship between props and actors is not as clear cut as Goffman holds it to be. Goffman's failure to account meaningfully for the impact of setting upon identity performances is particularly noticeable

given the detail and precision with which he thoroughly analyses and approaches the complex relationship between performer and audience. For the purpose of this research, the same detail and scrutiny will be applied to the relationship between the performer and the 'staging/props', with the relationship positioned as two-way, and with identity performances seen as emerging in part from the interplay between social actor and the specific location in which they are performing. Goffman's notion of dramaturgical identity performances therefore allows this thesis to consider performances of identity as appropriate for the specific situation in which they occur, allows for a consideration of identity as fluid, and allows this research to unpack how social structures work to frame and inform identity performances for the audience and the performer, but it does not provide an adequate frame for the consideration of the effects of the specific locations and spaces in which identity performances are taking place.

According to Turner (2001), social structures constrain human action. However, as advancements in the field of human geography and the growth of the field of science and technology studies (Callon, 1986; Latour, 2005), have shown, real physical structures and geographies also constrain and shape our actions (Sassen, 2010). It is noted that "public urban space has a mixed character as a concrete abstraction, as a product, and as a producer" (Lehtovuori, 2005, 151). This has often been a point that sociological enquiry has pushed aside and marginalised in order to focus upon the social structures that shape our actions and interactions (Keating, 2015). However, the realm of non-human also needs recognition, particularly given the rise of technological tools and platforms that we are using socially. As such, this research will construct a theoretical frame to approach social actions and interactions in a manner that encompasses and accounts for the impact of space and location, and looks at how specific identity performances emerge from the enmeshing of specific socio-culturally bound actors with specific

locations. In order to explore these issues, this chapter will now move on to consider how best to

account for the role of non-human elements in producing location-specific identity performances.

3.4. Accounting for space and the role of the non-human.

If we are to consider the role of design in producing and mediating specific identity performances, a theoretical framework is needed that accounts for how humans interact with, in, and through specific social spaces. One such approach towards considering social space can be found in the works of Henri Lefebvre (2000), and his work in the (re)production of social space. Lefebvre's work adopted a Marxist positioning to consider social spaces as continually evolving realms that emerge conceptually through the interaction between the manner in which space is conceived by designers, the manner in which it is co-opted conceptually by the users of that space, and the spatial practises that happened within that space (Harvey, 2005; Lefebvre, 1991). Lefebvre's work addresses some of the issues of Foucault's broad overview of society in that Lefebvre suggested that designers would conceive different spaces with different social ideals, meaning that certain actions were encouraged or discouraged specific to that locale (Harvey, 2005). As Delle (1998, 26) aptly puts it "specific spatialities thus define specific behaviours". These spaces therefore are designed to create or perpetuate a set of social relations of production. Thus Lefebvre's work allows a consideration through which we can begin to unpack the importance of the particular design choices made on a site-by-site basis. Rather than just looking at social space as an extension and embodiment of socio-cultural ideals and Discourses, Lefebvre suggests we should instead consider the stylised and purposeful presentations and choices made by designers. Such an approach towards the purposeful design of social spaces has been successfully applied to in the fields of Urban Theory and Human Geography (Gaver, 1996; Gieryn, 2000) with researchers looking at the design of spaces such as pubs (Bell, 1994) and small towns (Humon, 1990).

Nonetheless, Lefebvre's work has a number of issues in regards to its treatment of social space. Firstly, it relies heavily upon the interpretation of the researcher (Shields, 1999). Lefebvre's work reveals the

manner in which the design and representation of social space can reveal the intentions, aims, and ideals of the designer. However, he provides no frame through which to unpack these (Brenner, 2008; Harvey, 1973), nor, crucially, does he provide a manner for the verification of the interpretation of the designer's intent by the researcher (Hernes, 2004; Merrifield, 2011). As such, Lefebvre's model can be criticised for providing a framework through which the ideals of the researcher are imposed to presume the ideals of the designer without any proposed method of verification. Arguably what is important is not how the researcher conceives of the designers' intent, but how those who use the social spaces conceive of it, and how they subsequently negotiate and interact in these spaces (Unwin, 2000). Lefebvre provides no solution to this problem (Stewart, 1995) as his focus is upon the abstract concept of space across many levels rather than the users' experiences. However, as detailed later in this chapter in the discussion of Comic Book Theory, I suggest that this can best be understood through the notion of 'closure', which does not presume the intention of design but instead focuses upon how design choices are interpreted and negotiated by the user.

Lefebvre's work has a further noticeable flaw beyond potentially assuming the intent of the designer. Namely, Lefebvre's focus is squarely upon the realm of the cognitive, not upon the realm of the physical (Harvey, 2000). That is to say that Lefebvre fails to deal with the impact of the physical space itself, and instead focuses his approach towards social space upon the conceptual aspects. In essence, Lefebvre fails to engage with how these abstract concepts come to be manifested in a physical form, and how this physical form is subsequently engaged with to produce specific social actions and interactions. Subsequent theories have attempted to show that the separation of the conceptual and physical realm is problematic, unnecessary, and often ineffectual (Latour, 2005; Soja, 1996), and have rejected a purely human-centric approach to focus upon the role of many non-human aspects and elements that shape, effect, enforce, and mediate daily activity.

One such attempt to account for the role of the physical non-human in shaping human action and interactions can be found in the works of Marshall McLuhan and the Toronto School of Communication Theory in the field of Media Studies, most well-known arguably for coining the aphorism "the medium is the message" (McLuhan, 1964). Using this aphorism, McLuhan argued that Media Studies should focus less upon the messages being communicated through media, and more upon the medium through which they are being sent, positing that the medium had the transformative ability to change how we are acting and interacting, and how we understanding and frame social actions and interactions (McLuhan, 1964).

"The medium is the message" may, at first, seem strangely paradoxical as a statement. Surely the message itself is the message? McLuhan however purposefully intended this statement to be paradoxical (Morris & Ogan, 1996). He held that the content of a message was unimportant or secondary, and that it was the form or medium through which the message was sent that affected our actions (McLuhan, 1964; Sundar & Nass, 2001). McLuhan suggested that the adoption of new mediums of communication changed "the scale and form of human association and action" (McLuhan, 1964, 9), and as such, the mediums of communication should be the focus of attention, rather than the specific messages being sent (Hodge, 2003). The technology, according to McLuhan, could change us physically, causing us to rely upon different senses and actions to use it (Waldron & Veblen, 2008). For example, McLuhan (1964) highlights how different aspects of the body were prioritised in oral, spoken, and heard communication than would be prioritised in written and visually perceived communication methods. McLuhan therefore posited that new mediums changed our societies and bodies on a number of levels, using this positioning to argue for depth and nuance when considering the effects of technology upon

human action (Gallagher et al., 2001). He suggested that the focus of analysis should be upon "the physical and social consequences of the designs or patterns as they amplify or accelerate existing processes" (McLuhan, 1964, 24).

However, McLuhan's focus on the importance of the medium over the message fractures and distances the message that is being conveyed from the medium through which it is being conveyed (Gallagher et al., 2001). This discounts the message as unimportant, or at least, less important than the impact of the overall medium itself (Logan, 2010). Though arguably this was a necessary reversal from the previous position that McLuhan argued against in the 1960s, it nonetheless suffers from the same deterministic stance he opposed, instead merely reversing the direction of attention (Schultz et al., 2011). That is to say that McLuhan demands a consideration of the effect of the physical world upon our social actions and interactions, arguing that we shouldn't have a one-way relationship in which we only study how humans use technology. However, in doing so, McLuhan manages to equally focus upon a one-way relationship between technology and humans, this time focusing upon the manner in which technology can affect humans (Bingham, 1996; Wellman, 2004). In this regard McLuhan does not acknowledge that humans can have novel and individual experiences with technology.

Nonetheless, McLuhan's focus upon the impact of technology to affect and mediated the ability of humans to act and interact raises some salient points and has continued to spur a significant focus upon how technology may be affecting us (Jeffrey, 1989; Shaw, 1999). As mentioned in the literature review, this is an aspect of social media use that this research is keen to account for, with a consideration of how individual users make use of social media platforms in unique and novel manners (Sundar, 2004). It is clear however that a focus upon the potential of technology alone does not provide a consideration of

the many ways in which technology can and will be utilised by the user (Ariel and Avidar, 2015; Bar et al., 2016). As Nash (2012) suggests, there is a need to account for "the user's ability to exert control over content" (Nash, 2012, 199). Research continues to point out the need to account for the socio-cultural positioning of the user online (Niedt, 2016). As such this research aims to understand how the participants' socio-cultural backgrounds affect how they contextualise, understand, and interact in, on, and with technology, as well as considering how technology is shaping their social actions and interactions online. Rather than focusing on and prioritising either the medium, or the message, an approach is needed that focuses upon the relationship *between* the medium and the message.

Actor-Network Theory (Latour, 2005) appears to offer one such happy medium between Lefebvre's largely conceptual approach to the effects of design, and McLuhan's overly deterministic approach towards the effects technology can have upon our actions and interactions. Actor-Network Theory (ANT) instead frames the social as a specific manifestation that emerges from the interactions between specific users with their own socio-cultural resources, and specific non-human features and affordances (Law, 1999; Mützel, 2009). It is from the enmeshing of the specific human and non-human factors that a locationally specific manifestation of the social is realised (Callon, 1999; Dolwick, 2009). Rather than approaching technology as effecting all users in the same manner, ANT considers how individual and situated users are interacting with specific mediums to create meaning in unique manners (Latour, 2005). ANT therefore attempts to purposefully invert the idea that the physical, natural, and technological worlds are passive realms that humans effect, as Lefebvre maintains (Gottdiener, 1993), to instead look at how the human and the physical realms affect one another, in turn presenting a bi-directional approach to the relationship between humans and technology Lacking from both Lefebvre and McLuhan's work. Using ANT, to butcher McLuhan's work, the medium is *also* part of the message. Admittedly, this is not as pithy, nor as purposefully ambiguous as McLuhan's aphorism (1964) but it

serves to highlight the aims of this research to study both the medium and the message equally as the subjects and focus of analysis, with an emphasis upon how individual narratives and uses can arise, rather than a focus upon uniform technology use. Given this, the next sections of this chapter will focus primarily upon the work of Bruno Latour (2005) in the field of Actor-Network Theory to understand how to conceptualise and account for the enmeshing of non-human and human in identity performances.

Actor-Network Theory.

Led primarily by the work of Bruno Latour (1996, 2005), Actor-Network Theory (ANT) originally stemmed from Science and Technology Studies (STS) with the viewpoint of conceptualizing and exploring the *socio-technical* processes of scientific and technical innovation (Callon, 1986). By this they meant the manner in which scientific knowledge emerged from the enmeshing of technology and humans. In the 30 years following, Latour and Callon, along with researchers from a broad array of fields such as anthropology (Farias & Bender, 2010), geography (Bosco, 2006), and education (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010) have attempted to account for the effect of the non-human world in co-creating our reality.

Latour's work provides an ontological approach to social theory that attempts to deal with many of the criticisms of essentialist social theories in regards to agency and epistemology (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010; Mützel, 2009). It is notoriously difficult to summarize, which in part is due to the myriad of different approaches and research done under the banner of ANT since the early work of Bruno Latour and Michel Callon in the mid-1980s (Law & Hassard, 1999). Indeed, the name Actor-Network Theory is described by Latour as "a name that is so awkward, so confusing, so meaningless that it deserves to be kept" (Latour, 2005, 9). Nonetheless, much of the research conducted under the banner of ANT serves in

general to understand the social as more than just the result of human interaction alone (Sayes, 2014) and aims to provide a purposeful and overt account of the myriad effects of the non-human world around us (Couldry, 2008; Fenwick & Edwards, 2010; Law, 2009).

Given the broad interest in ANT, many researchers have struggled when attempting to reduce ANT down into to a single workable blanket theory (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). It is not a unified theory as such (Law, 1999); one person's reading of ANT has and will differ from others (Hanseth et al., 2004, Hitchings, 2003). Indeed, Latour commented upon this lack of clarity when he stated that "there are four things that do not work with actor-network theory; the word actor. the word network, the word theory and the hyphen" (Latour, 1999, 15). By this Latour meant that ANT is perhaps not best conceived of as a theory but rather as an epistemological positioning that situates the non-human as an impactful and impactive element in creating reality. Nonetheless, there are key relevant points and ideas that connect in the wide array of studies and approaches towards ANT, and therefore ANT becomes a useful nomer and catch-all term for the theories that have evolved from the original works posited by Callon and Latour in the 1980s. All the works presented under the banner of ANT contains within them concepts that, when abstracted from the many paths of ANT, provide a useful and relevant toolset for exploring the rich complexities of the social world (Law, 1999).

In essence, ANT at its core attempts to break down long-standing dichotomies between realism and objectivism (Mützel, 2009). It starts from the position of dealing with many of the criticisms raised in the previous sections in regards to the work of Lefebvre and Goffman by entwining human elements, social categories, and Discourses with the non-human; the natural, the physical world of things, the design of bodies, technologies, artefacts and so on (Whittle & Spicer, 2008), with the focus of analysis upon the

artefacts that emerge from the specific entwining of these disparate elements within a specific given locale. Rather than positing social actions, interactions, and effects as something that happens upon the realm of the non-human, ANT argues that the social emerges from the intertwining of the human and non-human (Murdoch, 1998). This is perhaps best summed up by Fenwick & Edwards (2010):

> *Actor-Network Theory examines the associations of human and non-human entities in the performance of the social, the economic, the natural, the educational, etc. The objective is to understand precisely how these things come together – and manage to hold together, however temporarily – to form associations that produce agency and other effects: for example, ideas, identities, rules, routines, policies, instruments, and reforms"* (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010, 3. Emphasis in original).

Latour's work therefore aims to emphasise and re-appropriate the realm of the material in sociology in order to understand that the realm of the social does not exist in a vacuum and is not the product of human action alone (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010; Mützel, 2009). Instead, Latour (1996) posits that that the non-human world we inhabit works to shape the social realm and as such should not be ignored or explain away merely as an unimportant 'other' in Sociology, or excluded from the front end of the equation in the style of Kant (1998) and Lefebvre (1991). Latour argues that objects should not be an afterthought or positioned as a separate realm upon which social actions and interactions take place, but that objects should be given equal consideration with humans during analysis (Callon, 1999). As Law (1999) suggests, "entities take their form and acquire their attributes as a result of their relations with other entities" (Law, 1999, 2). Law argues that as such, the prioritising of human entities alone in this equation, as has been traditionally prevalent in sociology (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010; Law & Hassard,

1999), is largely questionable. Latour suggests that any discussion of the social should therefore "pay attention to the material and extrasomatic resources" (Latour, 1984, 264).

Social entities can be considered at once actors *and* networks, in the sense that they are able to impact upon and act within the world as actors, but that they are formed as locationally-specific entities due to the enmeshing of many elements, human and non-human (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). Hence, the duality present at the heart of the term 'actor-network' (Latour, 2005). ANT attempts then to view actor-networks both as actors that impact the world around them, and as networks realised within the situation within which they find themselves due to the relationship between a number of materially heterogeneous elements (Law 1999, Latour 2005). As they are the result of a number of interacting elements, both human and non-human, they are susceptible to potential changes in the formation of the network (Law, 2009). ANT holds therefore that such constructions cannot be assumed to be pre-given (Callon, 1986; Whittle & Spicer, 2008) but are instead negotiated in an ongoing manner between many heterogeneous elements specific to that given situation (Latour, 2005), and are not immune from deconstruction; they are at all times potentially unstable (Latour, 1999).

Importantly for this research, each enmeshing of these elements is locationally specific and emerges from the specific iteration of non-human and human present in that location (Latour, 2005). In other words, "entities achieve their form as a consequence of the relations in which they are located" (Law, 1999, 4). As such, an ANT inspired approach should consider "all entities, all objects and, consequently, all aspects of space and spatiality" (Koch, 2005, 7). Thus ANT allows for a consideration of the physical world's role in the creation and formation of specific iterations of 'the social' (Latour, 1996). Such ideas again have picked up much traction lately, for example in the field of disability studies (Galis, 2011;

Munro, 2009) which unpacks how, for disabled people, their experience of the social is largely inseparable from the location that they are experiencing it in.

ANT attempts therefore to shift the focus and the ontological positioning of sociology away from an isolated consideration of the social and towards a much-needed contextualisation of specific space with specific user, an aspect that this research is keen to account for, especially as there is a need to account for specific online features within the context in which they emerge rather than assuming they will be used in a uniform manner across a range of platforms (Stroud et al., 2016). As Kowert et al. (2016:5) highlight, "Recognising the unique characteristics of different mediated, social spaces is key to understanding what role these different social services play in our everyday lives".

ANT's positioning therefore continues Foucault's line of enquiries into the construction of the world we inhabit (Newton, 2002), taking an anti-essentialist, relational stance to observe the world (Hayward, 2012), but importantly looking at these constructions beyond just the sole lens of 'Discourse' to acknowledge the very real and impactful role of the material world. As Vis (2009) puts it, ANT looks "beyond language to all entities" (Vis, 2009, 116), to position discursive formations as one of many elements that might affect how reality emerges within a specific location at a given time (Fox, 2000). In this manner, ANT attempts to view society as a "thick, rich, layered and complex matter" (Latour, 1996, 373). With this in mind we will move on to discuss the affordance of agency to non-human elements.

Agency of non-humans.

ANT insists upon an ontological shift away from an isolated consideration that accounts only for the human aspect of the social alone. For ANT, humans should not be considered superior or assumed as more important in any situation. That is, ANT insists 'human' and 'non-human' must be considered equally (Latour 2005, Law 1999). However, this does not mean, as some have suggested (Collins & Yearly, 1992), that ANT means humans and non-humans must be considered *equal*. Despite critiques of ANT suggesting that it affords and creates an equality in agency between humans and non-humans (Winner, 1993), a close reading of Latour's work reveals this not to be the case (Martin, 2005; Pickering, 1993). Latour (2005) does not suggest that humans and non-humans act in the same way and are afforded the same rights as actors in the world. He instead suggests that we should considered how these rights have been constructed; how we come to understand and situate the roles of humans and non-humans, and how it is this constructed reality has come to be accepted (Lynch, 1996). This in many ways reflects the stance that this paper wishes to take towards identity performances, with an understanding that these social performances emerge as the result of specific interactions with, through, in, and on specific non-human platforms.

Crucially, ANT is not suggesting that non-human objects are afforded 'intentionality' (Dennett, 1987; Le Morvan, 2005; Winner, 1993) in their ability to impact human actions and interactions (Law, 1999). They are not acting upon us with intent of forethought of their own volition (Martin, 2005), but intention or not, they still impact upon how we can act and interact. To emphasise this need for equal consideration, ANT uses the term 'actant' to describe human and non-human entities on the same level, rather than differentiating between them (Callon, 1986). Latour therefore defines actant as "something that acts or

to which activity is granted by another…an actant can literally be anything provided it is granted to be the source of action" (Latour, 1996, 373).

The term actant then is not tied to humans or individuals; it can be literally anything that is the source of action, human, non-human, or inhuman. The affordance of equal consideration and focus that ANT provides is not to suggest that there are not differences between these elements but that we should approach them with a 'generalised symmetry' (Callon, 1984), to afford equal consideration to their potential roles in forming the world and the social (Callon & Law, 1997; Latour, 2005). At any time, any actant can have the potential to impact the world (not that the impact will be the same, or even similar). The differences amongst these heterogeneous elements are negotiated in a spatially bound manner. Latour highlights this, emphasising that any action by any entity, human or non-human, "requires paying the same semiotic price. The effects will be different, the genres will be different, but not the work of attributing, imputing, distributing action, competences, performances and relations" (Latour, 2005, 8).

Therefore, ANT can be considered as de-centralising the object (Law 2002), following on from the post-structuralist turn of Foucault and others which aimed to de-centre the human subject (Hall, 1992; Pile & Thrift, 1995). If, as post-structuralism holds, subjects can be considered heterogeneous and fluid, ANT holds that objects can too (Latour, 2005, Pickering, 1993). Objects can be considered fluid as the many actants that network to create the object are heterogeneous and are in interaction with each other (Law, 2009). Indeed, to further complicate the matter, and in an attempt to ontologically move away from the anthropocentrism prevalent in sociology, ANT holds that nothing can truly be assumed or considered a complete and separate actant, free from the input and influence of any other actant (Law,

1999). Instead everything must be deconstructed, evaluated, and considered to understand how it has come to be the way it is and how it impacts the world around it (Latour, 2005).

Given this, ANT potentially provides a useful frame to continue to work of Goffman and consider identity performances. Using ANT, not only can we consider how the audience effects the identity performances present, but we can also deconstruct and consider the many other elements of the location-specific performance, including non-human 'staging' and 'props'. Indeed, using ANT an identity performance can be seen as both a network of actants, human and non-human, working together to create the specific identity performance being performed, and also as an actor itself in even larger aspects of the specific social situation. In terms of identity it is worth noting that ANT suggests that, like any entity, people are actor-networks, both acting within the world, and shaped and influenced by a myriad of materially heterogeneous elements. People are therefore both a network formed by the interaction of a number of diverse elements, and parts of larger actor-networks. Law highlights this, suggesting "people are relational effects that include both the human and the nonhuman" (Law, 2009, 147). For ANT, actors are not fixed entities, but are constantly performed networks that are always in action. Everything is both an actor *and* a network, depending on the viewpoint. As Callon puts it, an actor-network is:

"Reducible neither to an actor alone nor to a network…An actor-network is simultaneously an actor whose activity is networking heterogeneous elements and a network that is able to redefine and transform what it is made of" (Callon, 1987, 93).

The heterogeneous elements present in an actor-network (Callon, 1987) come together through the process known as 'punctualization' (Latour 1992, 2005; Law, 1992). It is through the process of punctualization that actors come to be considered a black-boxed (Latour, 2005) 'whole'; a complete and

fully formed actor that is not seen as a complicated collection of parts, but as a complete and unified object (Lynch, 1996). Callon explains this concept by suggesting that "the process of punctualization thus converts an entire network into a single point or node in another network" (Callon 1991, 153). Whilst punctualization and black-boxing are useful concepts in that they provide some understanding of the boundaries of a specific actor-network (Smith & Brennan, 2012), the meaning and effects of these locationally-specific boundaries are not fully explored in ANT. ANT purposefully ignores examining the impact of these boundaries to instead focus upon following the many elements that work to influence and form the locationally-specific actor and other actors (Prout, 1996). In essence, ANT is concerned with the construction of these boundaries of specific actor-networks (Law, 1992), not the *effect* of them. Whilst this research is keen to account for how identity is formed through the enmeshing of human, inhuman, and nonhuman elements, the boundaries that constitute a given identity performance in social media are worthy of exploration. it is the definitions and boundaries of the specific identity performances that are important as they tell us how social actors are perceived and constrained within a given location, how they are able to act and interact within that space, how they are *supposed* to act and interact within that space, and how these boundaries are negotiated, perceived, and potentially challenged by the individual user. To examine and understand the importance of the boundaries of an actor-network and the restrictions these can place upon how an actor-network can thus act and interact within any given space and perceive their role in it, a further discussion is needed, which can be provided through the work of Karen Barad, presented in the next section of this paper.

It is worth mentioning here, before moving onto the work of Barad, that ANT can be unendingly cyclical in nature, an aspect of ANT that can often make for a confusing logical spiral. The punctualized actor-networks can affect the actants that play a role in creating it as an actor-network (Collins & Yearley, 1992). Or, in other words, an actant can be part of an actor-network *and* affected by that actor-network.

Latour's approach at time therefore loses some of its impact in discussing specific aspects as it far too often becomes lost in following infinite unending relations. Such an approach has therefore been heavily criticised as lacking focus and prioritisation (Castree, 2002; Fine, 2005), most noticeably and scathingly by Collins and Yearley (1992), who suggest that the cyclical line of thinking leads ANT into an unanswerable epistemological 'chicken and egg debate'.

Indeed, utilising ANT as a usable theory of analysis has proven noticeably tricky in sociology (Walsham, 1997), a fact that Latour himself was aware of (Latour 1999, 2005). As Latour (1999) notes "explanation does not follow from description; it is description taken that much further". The concerns with using ANT as a theory may in part be due to the fact that ANT is not a single theoretical perspective; it is more of an ontological positioning that attempt to acknowledge the role of the non-human in social situations and provide a re-contextualisation of the realm of the social (Sayes, 2014). As such, it does not provide a framework through which the relationship between humans, non-humans, and social Discourses and structures can be examined and followed (Venturini, 2010). Instead ANT merely reframes the focus of analysis by stating that there is a relationship between these elements that should be followed and accounted for (Latour, 1999; Nimmo, 2011). Given this, a workable theoretical frame is needed that is informed by the ontological concerns of materially heterogeneous consideration presented by ANT, but that presents a model through which the relationship between the human, the non-human, and the Discursive can be examined.

Agential Realism and agential cuts - accounting for the narratives paths not chosen.

It is worth briefly taking one final turn at this point in this discussion of Actor-Network Theory to expand upon one of the weaker outlying aspects of the theory, a turn that will help to incorporate Latour's work

into the realm of Comic Book Studies, detailed in the next section of this chapter, in order to provide an understanding of how specific iterations of identity are realised through the enmeshing of materially heterogeneous elements. Specifically, this section will be introducing the work of Karen Barad and the notion of Agential Realism (Barad, 2003, 2007, 2011).

Barad (2003) developed the notion of Agential Realism in part as a response to the overly complicated view of endless relations and self-fulfilling actor-networks proposed by ANT (Barad, 2007; Simon, 2015). Barad's approach still considers the way the social emerges from the enmeshing of locationally-specific materially heterogeneous actants, but rather than 'following the actor' (Latour, 2005) to observe all of the actants that form parts of continually unending networks and actors, Barad's focus is upon how we create the boundaries around these materially heterogeneous elements to form an actor, what makes the boundaries of these actors specific to this locale (Dale & Latham, 2015) and what these boundaries mean for how we act and interact within a given social location (Faulkner & Runde, 2012; Søndergaard, 2013). Through this line of questioning Barad aims to allow for considerations of how specific actor-networks have come to be through their relations, what has been excluded and discarded from specific actor networks, and what constrains, confines, and defines the agency of the actor-network (Barad, 2003; Shotter, 2013). It is this shift towards a consideration of the process of emerging that Barad highlights as crucial for an understanding of reality (Barad, 2011). She suggests therefore that "the world is an ongoing open process of mattering through which 'mattering' itself acquires meaning and form in the realization of different agential possibilities" (Barad, 2003, p. 817). Or put another way, "empirical claims do not refer to individually existing determinate entities, but to phenomena-in-their-becoming, where becoming is not tied to a temporality of futurity, but rather it a radically open relatingness of the world worlding itself (Barad, 2011, 148).

Barad thus refers to this relational entwining as 'intra-activity' (Barad, 2003, 2007; Fenwick & Edwards, 2013). She purposefully uses the term intra-activity to distinguish from interactivity (see Dyer, 2016). For Barad interaction suggests that two or more separate, pre-determined, and distinct entities are coming together to create a new entity, whereas intra-action suggests that all entities emerge together through and with each-other to make and delineate specific iterations of entities (Aradau, 2010; Marshall & Alberti, 2014). It is through this process of intra-action that boundaries of knowledge and power are formed and enforced (Barad, 2003) and agential cuts begin to emerge (Kaiser & Thiele, 2014; Van der Velden & Mörtberg, 2012).

As part of this fixation upon how we create materially diverse elements into boundaried actors, Barad proposes that we should not only view the specific iterations of actors that are presented to us (Birke et al., 2004), we should also consider how they came to be presented in that form (Højgaard et al., 2012; Juelskjaer, 2013). That is, Barad proposes that we should also consider the detritus - that that is lost and removed on the way to the specific iteration of actor-network that is arrived at (Aradau, 2010; Herzig, 2004). Drawing on a wealth of feminist literature, Barad suggests that agential cuts are made to determine and shape the boundaries of what can act and interact within any local setting, and what is considered a complete and appropriate actor for that space (Barad, 2011; Fenwick & Edwards, 2013). Barad suggests we should pay attention to "agential cuts that produce determinate boundaries and properties of 'entities' within phenomena" (Barad, 2007, 148). Or as Juelskjaer (2013) puts it, the approach becomes more focused whilst still acknowledging the myriad heterogeneous elements that form a specific actor-network, so that the focus is upon "agential cuts; cuts that constitute boundaries, categories and 'properties' of phenomena, cuts through which specific concepts and specific material– discursive reconfigurations of the world become meaningful" (Juelskjaer, 2013, 757).

In essence, Barad suggests that we define the world around us by what it *isn't* as much as we do by what it is (Iovino & Oppermann, 2012); we engage in the process of labelling and 'othering' that around us (Butler, 1986; De Beauvoir, 1953), creating and maintaining categories and boundaries to make sense of a world of infinite relations. As such, Barad proposes that researcher should not only engage in considering the actor-network they see before them as a point of study, but also consider the assemblages that *could have been*, and the manner in which these boundaries are negotiated (Barad, 2011; Pinch, 2011; Søndergaard, 2013). The object of enquiry becomes "material-discursive practices by which their differential constitutions are marked" (Barad 2003, 810). Or, as Fenwick and Edwards (2013) argue, "an agential cut is always a performance: the boundaries distinguishing knower, known and knowledge do not pre-exist the cut. Further, an agential cut can only be performed in a local moment and place" (Fenwick & Edwards, 2013, 59).

It is this essence of agential cuts creating specific boundaried wholes out of the enmeshing of materially heterogeneous elements that is crucial to Barad's work (Jespersen et al., 2012). As Barad puts it, "cuts cut 'things' together and apart" (Barad, 2007, 179). Barad's (2007) argument therefore augments ANT's notion of 'punctualization' to argue that it is important that we consider the role of humans in enacting this process of punctualization, viewing specific networked arrangements as a defined and complete whole, creating and defining the boundaries of possibility from the enmeshing of materially heterogeneous actants. These boundaries therefore tell us about the role of things, human and non-human, within a social setting. Kaiser and Thiele (2014) argue agential cuts "co-constitute subjects, objects and the ongoing pattern-formations in which they/we participate" (Kaiser & Thiele, 2014, 166). Barad (2003) argues that the act of creating a punctualized whole is crucial as it supposes a boundary which limits and controls the action and agency of this 'boundaried' actor, and situates its role within the given setting (Aradau, 2010). In such a manner, Barad's work serves to supplement Latour's work in

ANT (Latour, 1999), providing a consideration of what has been excluded. Importantly though, Barad's work further augments Latour's work, providing an acceptance of, and crucially an open examination of, the boundaries around the many actants involved in the ongoing creation of actor-networks, rather than ignoring these boundaries in order to follow an unending web of relations.

In order to adopt this consideration, Barad heads towards what could tentatively be seen as a *post-Actor-Network Theory*, an approach that grounds its understanding heavily in the work of post-structuralists such as Foucault and Butler (Barad, 2007; Hekman, 2014) in that Barad's approach acknowledges the power in naming and defining the boundaries of specific realities, allowing a researcher to look at the manner in which these boundaries are maintained and negotiated, and how "knower, known, and knowledge" (Fenwick & Edwards, 2013, 59) are formed from and around the enmeshing of materially heterogeneous elements. Using agential cuts, Barad (2003, 2007) holds that assemblages also have ethical consequences and ethical implications as each specific iteration of an assemblage works to exclude or reduce other iterations (Marshall & Alberti, 2014). This works much in the way that Foucault described the power of Discourses and the inherent links between power and knowledge; as Discourses become more and more accepted, and more ratified by institutions of power, alternate Discourses become ignored, removed, and even possibly punished. The same is true of Barad's assemblages, certain iterations become expected and realised as truth though their proclivity and ubiquity, at the expense of other iterations. However, Barad's view of this is necessarily grounded in heterogeneous materiality. As Marshall and Alberti (2014) put it:

> "*Butler's work, building on Foucault, interrogates the way regulatory regimes, particularly*
>
> *norms, produce disciplined/ ideal and therefore 'normal' bodies from the plurality of forms taken*
>
> *by matter...For Barad, what is lacking in Butler and Foucault is a sense of how the actual matter*

of bodies is inseparable from — and productive of — the on-going process of their

materialization" (Marshall & Alberti, 2014, 27).

The specific iterations of assemblages we see then also have form in how they exclude the production of other forms and iterations of assemblages. This understanding plays a critical and crucial role in considering the design of websites, and how specific iterations of identity are guided and realised by and through this design. We begin to see how design manifests correct forms of interaction between humans and non-humans, and how other aspects are discouraged, frowned upon, or even banned. By accounting not only for the manifestations that arise but also those that are not permitted to arise, Barad's approach allows for a consideration of how the dominant ideals maintain their claim to realism and maintain their power. We can also consider how subversive or antithetical assemblages are dealt with, and we can begin to see how specific iterations are guided into being in a 'materially-discursive' manner (Barad, 2003).

This notion of agential cuts has been used to examine how gender comes to have determinate meanings within specific locations (Van der Velden & Mörtberg, 2012), and how specific speech patterns are encouraged for different actors within a given social location (Shotter, 2013). This research will take the same approach towards identity to consider identity a materially heterogeneous entity (Latour 2005), specific to a given location (Goffman, 1959), that is defined and boundaried in a specific manner (Barad, 2003), a manner which limits and controls the action and agency of this 'boundaried' actor, and situates its role within the given setting. It is how these boundaries are understood by the performer that will provide insight into how their identity performances are constrain and shaped in any given platform, and, crucially, provide insight into how the performer negotiates and challenges these boundaried restrictions to create novel performances of identity. This will help consider Research Question 3, which

asks how the participants understand and negotiate their identities, their actions, and their interactions online. In taking such an approach this thesis can consider the many actants, human and non-human, that create and negotiate the specific agency of each identity witnessed on a specific platform-by-platform basis, unpacking in a clearer manner the effects of design upon each specific iteration of identity witnessed. A consideration of agential cuts will also allow for a consideration of the control of agency and power to act and interact online, and the manner in which the boundaries of these are perceived and negotiated. The specific manners in which this thesis will consider the negotiation of power and agency in the creation of an identity performance online will be outlined in the next section in which we take a final turn to consider the work conducted in Comic Book Studies (McCloud, 1993).

3.5. Introducing Comic Book Studies.

Comic Book Studies is a field of studies that, unsurprisingly, looks at how a narrative is formed through the use of juxtaposed images (Dyer, 2016; McCloud, 1993). Comic Book Studies is a useful field that provides a workable model of the relationship between materially heterogeneous elements that including human, non-human and Discursive elements that form to create a cohesive, specific, and individual whole. This thesis posits that by adapting the ideas presented in Comic Book Studies, we can account for the performative nature of identity, guided by Discursive and social expectations, and the needs and expectations of the audience, whilst still also accounting for individualistic and stylistic interpretations/presentations of identity, and importantly, also paying detailed attention to the effects of design on identity performances.

As a frame of analysis, Comic Book Studies allows for a consideration of the active role that the reader of a media form plays in creating a narrative whole from these materially heterogeneous parts, along with

a consideration of what the reader utilises from their socio-cultural background to complete the narrative in an individual and stylised manner, and how this process of creating a personalised whole is guided and shaped by the media form itself and by the design choices of the authors (Chute & DeKoven, 2006). I suggest that this can be used to present a theoretical frame that can shed new light upon how we consider social media platforms as a texts for analysis, and allow us to unpack the interplay between the social media platforms, the users, and their socio-cultural background in a new and constructive manner to understand the creation of malleable and site-specific identity performances.

Therefore, this thesis introduces and proposes Comic Book Theory as a theoretical framework that aids the understanding of social identity, adapted from the ideas introduced in Comic Book Studies. Comic Book Theory is informed by the materially heterogeneous approach of ANT and Latour, the location-specific performative notion of identity introduced by Goffman, the discursive socio-culturally bound sensibilities of Foucault, and the examination of the creation, negotiation, and effect of the different platform-specific boundaries created from one platform to the next as introduced by Barad. In order to introduce Comic Book Theory, I will start by exploring Comic Book Studies, focusing upon how Comic Book Studies helps understand the reader's negotiation and creation of an individual and stylistic narrative guided and shaped by and through the design of the media form.

Comic Book Studies.

Comic Book Studies is an expanding field of research that uses the comic book form to draw out the relationship between the artists, the media form, and readers to show how an individual narrative reality is co-construct by the interplay between all active parties (Berlatsky, 2009; Groensteen, 2013). The research, primarily led by the work of Scott McCloud (1993) offers a physical representation of a

media-based network in action; a narrative form that is co-created by the input of multiple materially heterogeneous elements, and realised in a stylised and individual manner by the reader due to their individual socio-cultural grounding (Chute, 2008; Heer & Worcester, 2009). The focus of discussion in Comic Book Studies rests upon the perspective of the reader, with an emphasis upon understanding how the reader uses, comprehends, and combines the various elements of a comic to form a narrative, using their own socio-cultural background to create a boundaried individual narrative (Bongco, 2000), and how this process can be guided by elements of design to suggest particular narrative readings and discourage others (Lefèvre, 2011; Pimenta & Poovaiah, 2010). Therefore, Comic Book Studies explores how a completed user-specific narrative reading is formed and filled out by many parts working together and impacting each other (McCloud, 1993).

It is important to highlight that Comic Book Studies, like many other fields of media studies, is more than happy to expand the focus of study to consider elements beyond just humans alone, and is comfortable in not maintaining the divide between human and non-human to instead embrace the reality that our perception of the world is filtered through our interaction with the various material and non-human elements around us (Buckingham, 2007; Howley, 2005). Comic Book Studies asks how this ongoing narrative creation is shaped and guided by various aspects such as page design, style, modal arrangements, shapes, sizes, and colours (Herman, 2010; Labio, 2015), as well as considering the influence of the specific background and resources of the individual user and their understanding of, and exposure to, other media forms that they draw upon to understand and interpret a particular comic book (Berlatsky, 2009, McCloud, 1993). Each reader's constructed narrative is therefore guided and influenced heavily by design, without which there would be no narrative to emerge (Dittmer & Latham, 2015), but the narrative is ultimately realised in a personal, stylised, and particular individual manner thanks to the socio-cultural resources the reader brings with them (Berlatsky, 2009; Groensteen, 2013).

The reader understands, makes sense of, and completes the comic book narrative through the concepts of closure, intertextuality, and extratextuality (McCloud 1993). It is these concepts, expanded upon in the next section, that allow for and demand a consideration of design elements, socially-grounded contextualisation, and individual stylised agency to understand how an individual narrative is reached. Comics offer us a distinct media form of study and consideration in its own right - not quite art, not quite written narrative text (McCloud, 1993). But it is this interplay between text and image, and the sequential nature of comic books that has produced pertinent and useful questions for all media forms (Pimenta & Poovaiah, 2010).

Understanding Comics – closure, extratextuality, and intertextuality.

McCloud (1993) defines comics as "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer" (McCloud, 1993, 9). For our discussion of digital identity performances, the important aspect of this definition is the idea of juxtapositioning; of the deliberate sequencing of images and text within a space (Groensteen, 2009). The fragmented nature of the images that appear in comics require active interaction and interpretation from the audience. The reader must make sense of the design; they must continuously connect and interpret the individual graphic units (or panels) provided by the authors of the comic and actively produce and make sense of a narrative whole (Herman, 2010). The reader is not only required to makes sense of the movement from one comic panel to the next, but also understand its place within the page, and the larger comic and narrative (Berlatsky, 2009).

The focus of Comic Book Studies then is to understand how the reader makes sense of the design to create a narrative whole. This narrative is guided by the design, but is also open to interpretation and

variation by the reader, who, due to the juxtaposed nature of the images and text provided, becomes involved in deciding exactly what happens between the panels, creating an individual personal narrative, guided by the media form and author (McCloud, 1993). McCloud therefore posits that comic books ask the reader to play an active role in creating a narrative, but that their role is guided and shaped by the design, the features of the images and texts, and the nature of the medium itself (McCloud, 1993). Some gaps between panels require more input from the reader than other, thus requiring larger narrative leaps and assumptions on the part of the reader (Groensteen, 2013; Labio, 2015). McCloud (1993) suggests therefore that comics are a highly and constantly participatory media form as the audience has to actively and consistently be engaged in creating the narrative in order to make sense of the juxtaposed images they are provided with.

The images and design that are presented to the audience in comics only reveal parts of the overall story; the audience is left to literally 'fill in the gaps' between each image in order to create and make sense of a continuous narrative (Cohn, 2013; Pratt, 2009). They are presented with a series of discrete images, and have to create a continuous whole from these images (Groensteen, 2013). The act of creating a continuous whole image out of the separated images the reader is presented with is known as 'closure' (McCloud, 1993; Versaci, 2001). The main space in which this closure is committed is the area between the panels known as the 'gutter' (Groensteen, 2013). However, it is important to note here that closure can also happen *within* images and comic panels as the audience attempts to make the image a fully-realised whole. The gutter however represents the space where two separated pieces of text become one joint narrative, as the reader attempts to 'connect the dots' to create a continuous, unified reality.

This act of closure can heavily involve the audience as they dissect and compile the given information from panel to panel. The 'gutter' between the panels can be seen as the space where human imagination comes into play; although comics themselves are mono-sensory, engaging only one sense to read them, in the gutter between the panels the users are free to engage and call upon all of their senses to fill in the gaps (McCloud, 1993). Each image acts as what Lessing (1766), who was discussing the effects of framing on pieces of art, described as a 'pregnant moment', giving birth to a whole world that is fleshed out by the reader. Closure is a useful term when considering how a narrative whole is created as it not only implies that the audience takes an active role in creating the story, but it also allows for a consideration of how this narrative whole is created in a personalised individual manner, as well as how this process is guided by the material design elements of the comic book (Round, 2007; Varnum & Gibbons, 2001). Closure suggests that the narrative created will not be the same for each reader; it is a narrative that is deeply personal, affected by our own perceptions, experiences, and understandings (Versaci, 2001). Closure is potentially informed, influenced, completed, and experienced differently from person to person (Cohn, 2013), as, when presented with a series of images, different users may draw upon different experiences and frames of reference in order to make sense of the gap between the two presented images (Maggio, 2007; Round, 2007). As such, via Comic Book Studies, we can consider the effects of design upon our actions and interactions, but also how these are realised in an individual and stylistic manner (Maggio, 2007; Versaci, 2001).

The question then becomes what are these gaps filled with? What do we fill in the gaps with to complete individual readings of the juxtaposed narrative presented in the design of the comic book? Comic Book Studies suggests that closure is aided and achieved through utilizing and linking the images given within the text to our extratextual knowledge, and our intertextual experiences (Kelley, 2003;

McCloud, 1993). Here extratextuality can be understood as the audiences' use of experiences and knowledge beyond solely that which is given in the text, allowing them to understand and make sense of the text (Stein & Thon, 2013). This includes socio-cultural background and real-life experiences. Intertextuality is the audiences' ability to link the given text to other texts they have experienced and consumed in order to make sense of the text they are reading (McCloud, 1993). Put another way, Intertextuality is the notion that the meaning of a text to the audience is shaped by its relations to other texts they may have experienced (Gray, 2006; Werner, 2004). As such, through intertextuality and extratextuality, each narrative is experienced on a personal level, and may differ from the narrative created by another reader as different readers draw upon different extratextual and intertextual information to understand and contextualise the narrative presented in the design, whilst still being guided towards a particular narrative by the design of the comic book (McCloud, 1993). Comics then can be seen as offering a jagged staccato rhythm of unconnected moments "which we then connect, via closure, to mentally construct a continuous, unified reality" (McCloud, 1993, 67).

This narrative reality is impacted by our individual knowledge and experience of other texts and information beyond that given in the text alone, and yet is also importantly shaped and guided by the design presented to the reader. The reader's individual narratives therefore can be considered a co-construction between the user, the media form, and the design (McCloud, 1993). It is important to emphasise that this process, whilst requiring the input of the reader to make the narrative meaningful, is largely guided by design. McCloud highlights that the level of interaction and input required from the audience to create this narrative whole and make meaningful sense of the disjointed images they are presented with can change based on how much information they are given by the authors in each image, and how much they have to do to connect one image to the next (McCloud, 1993). It is also influenced by many elements such as the types of lines used, the border around each image, the style of

presentation, the colour pallet, the textual information, and many other design features that suggest how the narrative should continue (Groensteen, 2013; Round, 2007). The narrative creation therefore is by no means completely boundless; it is restricted and guided by the design and form of the comic book, and could not be completed without the design of the comic book. McCloud highlights that certain actions can be taken by the author and artist to restrict the amount of work to be done by the audience to create a narrative, and to guide to reader towards a certain understanding of events (McCloud, 1993). One such method is through the use of different 'transitions' from one image to the next (Groensteen, 2013). The degree of involvement required by the reader to fill in these gaps can vary depending on the how much the two images differ, or the types of 'transitions' used from panel to panel (Dittmer, 2010; Lewis, 2010). Some panel transitions will require very little information to be filled in by the reader as not much happens between the panels, whilst others can require the audience to be heavily involved in rendering the transitions meaningful (Chute & DeKoven, 2006; Groensteen, 2013). However, the audience is kept constantly involved in making sense of the media form from image to image (Berlatsky, 2009).

McCloud (1993) suggests six different types of panel-to-panel transition, each requiring more input from the reader to fill in the gutter and create a meaningful whole based on the information provided by the design. The involvement of the reader doesn't just involve decoding from panel to panel, but also within the panel as they make sense of the art style and apply the information to reality. The reader also has to decide the order to read the panels, and plays a part in constructing the overall narrative and the page. This process of closure and completing the narrative therefore emerges from the enmeshing of design feature and the reader. McCloud therefore suggests that the completion of the narrative can be understood as an act of 'dynamic construction' (McCloud, 2006), with the building of the narrative undertaken by the interplay between the reader and the page structure itself. The reader is involved in

understanding the panel itself, the gaps between the panel, and the overall page and larger narrative (Mitchell, 2009) all of which play a role in shaping how the reader approaches, contextualises, and understands the text to form an individual narrative.

In essence then, Comic Books Studies highlights that the readers' understanding of a media form can be guided by their own readings and interpretations of the narrative (closure), their socio-cultural resources (extratextuality), and their understanding of similar media (intertextuality), as well as by the design of the media form and the amount and type of space they are given to create their own understandings. Comic Books Studies suggests that cohesive completed narratives can therefore be thought of as collaboration between a reader and the design, with the user utilising stylised individual understandings informed by a number of issues, and the design purposefully suggesting the completion of a narrative. By highlighting that narrative can be both guided by design, but also open to the user to place their own understanding drawn from their inter and extratextuality and their socio-cultural understanding, Comic Book Studies presents comics as a complex media form with multiple influences producing specific narratives.

Comic Book Studies offers us therefore the ability to highlight and draw out the relationship between the design elements of the media we consume, and our role as the audience. It also helps us think of the media forms, and indeed social media platforms as we will discuss in the next section, as networks formed of many heterogeneous actants, human and non-human, combining to make specific and unique narrative realities (McCloud, 1993; Groensteen, 2013). Given this, this thesis proposes that we can utilise comic books as a theoretical lens to understand identity performances online, and proposes the introduction of Comic Book Theory to view identity performances online as materially heterogeneous

narratives that are site specific and formed through the user's individual reading of a design that is created to guide and shape specific boundaried performances of identity. Different social media platforms will offer different 'transitions', asking the user to sometimes do more or do less to complete the identity performance narrative. The completion of this narrative will not only be informed by the design, but will be completed in an individual and stylised manner, with each user drawing upon differing intertextual and extratextual ideas and concepts to commit closure and negotiate the boundaries of identity. As such, identity performances can be thought of as a narrative that is formed of the interplay between user, design, and socio-cultural issues and ideals.

3.6. Introducing Comic Book Theory - Understanding Identity performances in Social Media through the lens of Comic Books.

Comic Books offers a practical and actionable lens through which we can reconcile the divide between the effects of form and medium and the effects of personal interpretation and understanding. The ideas presented in Comic Book Studies allow for a consideration of the precise manner in which an individual is able to create their own understanding of the media form, as well as the manner by which this is guided and negotiated through and by the design of the media form. Importantly, the approach is presented from the perspective of the audience's completion of the narrative as Comic Book Studies attempts to understand how the reader has understood the media form and created their individual narrative, but also how this process has been guided and shaped by a number of design features (McCloud, 1993). This is in part to allow a focus upon how design can affect the user's construction of a narrative without assuming the intent of the designer, a concept that was highlighted as potentially problematic in the discussion of Lefebvre's notion of representations of social space previously in this chapter. As researchers we cannot assume to know the motivation for the choices of the designer,

however, we can realistically measure and observe the *effects* of these choices, and attempt to understand how they have been negotiated by individual participants, especially if we gather this perspective from the users of the platforms. As such, the proposed Comic Book Theory detailed in the next section attempts to understand identity performances online as emergent from the interactions *between* socio-culturally grounded users and platform-specific design as users negotiate the boundaries of the specific platforms (Barad, 2003), and create their own narrative closure through inserting and utilising extratextuality and intertextuality, the selection of which is guided and influenced by aspects of design. Importantly this process is purposefully approached and analysed from the perspective of the users, with the aim of understanding how they negotiate and utilise these factors.

The ideas raised in Comic Book Studies reveal how narrative creation is a negotiated and location-specific concept, and also reveal how a media form can be considered as the emergence of the relationship between human, discursive, and non-human elements, working together to create an iteration of narrative reality. In this way Comic Book Studies treats the role of the non-human in the creation of a narrative in a similar manner to the notion presented by Barad (2003, 2007) in which the boundaries of reality are negotiated in a location-specific manner by the interaction of various materially heterogeneous elements. By utilising this location-specific materially heterogeneous approach in Comic Book Theory, and by focusing upon how this power and agency in the creation of a narrative is negotiated between multiple elements, this research will be able to consider in a practical manner, and in greater depth and breadth, the degree to which social media platforms involve the audience and how the audience renders the given information meaningful to form specific iterations of identity performance. In essence, this framework provides the ability to unpack a platform-specific performance negotiated on and through those platforms. Indeed, Foucault in 1984 noted the importance of environment in shaping and creating social actions and interaction, and the links between

space and knowledge. He noted that it was "somewhat arbitrary to try to dissociate…the practice of social relations, and the spatial distributions in which they find themselves. If separated, they become impossible to understand" (Foucault, 1984, 246). This thesis proposes that approaching social media performances from this angle could provide much needed practical and workable insight into how a personalised experience is shaped and formed in social media.

Given this, I propose a new theoretical framework through which to approach the issue of identity performance online. This framework, which I name Comic Book Theory, accounts for the manner in which materially heterogeneous design features enmesh with a socio-culturally grounded user to create unique identity performances. In this manner Comic Book Theory will draw upon the performative notion of identity suggested by Goffman (1959), but with an awareness of the need to consider the impact of devices (McCluhan, 1964), and to account for non-human elements (Latour, 2005) in a manner that considers the importance of boundaried negotiations and trade-offs between user and design (Barad, 2003). As such, in the next sections of this chapter I introduce and propose Comic Book Theory.

From 'studies' to 'theory'. Proposing Comic Book Theory.

As the Literature Review presented in Chapter 2 reveals, social media is highly structured and many of the platforms have made choices in regards to design aspects of the site that for one reason or another encourage certain behaviours and restrict or deny others (Dyer, 2015; Saker, 2016). Studies into social media therefore should not presume that the ability for interactivity offered online necessarily means greater freedom or control, as the availability of props to interact and act through is not limitless but purposeful and chosen in advance, which can restrict and shape how we are able to act and interact (see Manovich, 2001). It is how we produce identity performances from, through, on, and with these chosen

modes and restrictions that this research wishes to unpack. This can be aided by utilising the concepts of closure, intertextuality, and extratextuality which will help understand how the finished narrative is guided by design features, and realised in an individual manner by users with socio-cultural resources.

Thus this research proposes Comic Book Theory to understand identity performances in online social media platforms. By using the ideas of closure, we can consider how the individual user is guided towards certain identity performances by the specific design of the platform. Closure, in essence, suggests that the construction of the 'narrative' of identity performance is the result of the enmeshing of human, inhuman, non-human. It suggests, in a similar manner to ANT and Barad, that the ongoing identity performances is always and continually locationally bound and realised as a result of the specific user and the specific design features coming together to create the performance. Crucially, it also demands that the identity performance can never be considered purely human or purely technological alone. It is not the medium that is the message, and it is not the human that creates the specific identity performance, it is always and essentially the result of the specific human committing closure guided by and grounded in the specific features. The identity performance could not happen without either element, they are intertwined and both creating the identity performance, which would not be possible without the other. There could be no identity performance without the user to perform it. And there could be no identity performance without the design features through which to perform it, features which ultimately restrict, confine, and frame the performance. Therefore, not only do humans and non-humans co-habitate online spaces, they co-produce them, impacting upon each other, with humans shaping the content of media, and the media shaping and mediating the actions of the humans (see Panelli, 2010; Whatmore, 2006) In this manner, the boundaries of the identity performance are negotiated between materially heterogeneous elements (Barad, 2003).

Comic Book Theory therefore is explicitly non-deterministic, each performance is always and necessarily individual due to the unique enmeshing of user and design. Design features will never affect every user uniformly, but nonetheless they may suggest the 'ideal' or preferred usage, minimising unwanted uses and therefore, in a Baradian sense, creating boundaries around identity performances. Of course this notion of an ideal or preferred usage suggested by design will not be interpreted, approached, or even understood in the same manner by all users. As the discussion of Lefebvre's approach towards social space earlier in this theory chapter suggested, for a researcher to guess the intent of designer is futile and often largely pointless, as it is the user who has to come to their own conclusions about this and therefore negotiate it. It is their interpretation of the designer's intent that matters for their individual identity performances, not the interpretation of the research. The interpretation and explanation of these design elements will therefore be placed upon the individual user, as it is ultimately their individual performance and their negotiation and perception of these features that researchers can aim to unpack. I suggest therefore that a Comic Book Theorist should aim to understand and explore how each user perceives these platforms and design features, and how they negotiate with these features to create boundaried identity performance from materially heterogeneous elements. It is the realisation and manifestation of individual performances that this research is keen to unpack.

With closure, the relationship between human and design features is crucially malleable. Much as with the idea of transitions in comic books, sometimes the human will need to do more work to complete the identity performance, and will be allowed freer reign over the performance of identity to construct a more stylised narrative. Equally, sometimes the features will be presented in such a manner that the user will not have to input very much at all to complete the narrative. Therefore, the relationship

between these features should not be presumed. It is also crucial to note, again in a non-deterministic manner, that this does not mean of course that this potential will be realised by all users, as some may choose to utilise the larger freedom in different manners and some may create narrative leaps where little space is provided in manners that may not be anticipated by the designers of the platforms.

As suggested in the Literature Review, each user will approach social media in a unique way for unique purposes, with features being utilised and contextualised differently for and by each user (Florini, 2013; Sharma, 2013). This is largely where the concept of extratextuality comes into play. Extratextuality looks at how each user draws on their experiences outside of a text to understand and contextualise that text. When transposed to identity performances on social media, extratextuality still allows for an understanding of how design guides identity performances, but look at how the approach towards design is contextualised and grounded in the unique manner by each user, informed by their socio-cultural background. Examining extratextuality will allow for contextualisation of the identity performance, with an understanding of how the user's specific situation affects the manifestation of identity on any given platform, and a consideration of the different dynamics present on social media for users from differing backgrounds. This takes on extra pertinence given that, as the Literature Review highlighted, not all social actors are equal, and different features and online contexts may allow for some inequalities to pervade, or may equally challenge them (Chaudhry, 2015; Nguyen, 2016). An examination of extratextuality and how this effects how the user approaches and uses certain platforms and features will help therefore to account for the reality that not only do socio-cultural issues affect how users utilise social media (Sundar, 2004; Nash, 2012), they also affect their attitudes towards it, their treatment on it, and their experiences with it (Crawford & Gillespie, 2016; Rubin & McClelland, 2015). Comic Book Theory therefore aligns itself with Barad's notion of agential cuts (Barad, 2007, 2011), allowing for a greater consideration of how power and agency is negotiated on a platform-by-

platform basis. Crucially, in this way Comic Book Theory holds that identity online is always and continually grounded in, and contextualised through, offline reality and Discourses, thus challenging the notion of digital duality (Jurgenson, 2012; Pond, 2016).

Comic Book Theory also allows us to consider the notion of intertextuality, as the user's exposure to other media forms may affect how they approach and utilise this media form. Using intertextuality to view social media we can understand how they function as interactive texts whose meaning to the user is shaped by their intertextual relation to other texts, both online and offline, known to and accessed by that user. In turn, social media can be seen as impacting and affecting how readers understand and approach other texts, both online and offline, in an intertextual manner. Intertextuality therefore offers yet another frame through which academics can conceptualise the breakdown of digital dualism and the merging of the online and offline world (Jurgenson, 2012). Importantly, the social identity performance and engagement of and with these features does not have to be realised through the production of content alone. As established in the literature review, using social media involves more than just producing content alone (Muller, 2012). The mere possibility of equitable interactivity offered by media does not always mean this means of bi-directional interactivity will necessarily be taken up (Čičević et al., 2016) and users will utilise social media in different way to interact socially and to be social. Therefore, Comic Book Theory will approach social uses of social media beyond just content production alone.

One aspect that Comic Book Studies does not capture, but that the Literature Review reveals needs to be accounted for when considering identity performances online is the medium through which these platforms are accessed; the technology. This is understandable considering that comic books only

traditionally come in one format. Though recently there have been attempts to look at the impact of the internet and digital forms on comic that suggests that this format offers unique challenges and opportunities for narrative completion due mainly to the format through which it is accessed (Gilmore & Stork, 2014; Goodbrey, 2013). Nonetheless, this is an aspect that this research is keen to account for and an aspect that has been shown to affect how users utilise social media (Erickson, 2010; Saker, 2016). As such, Comic Book Theory will also account for the technology used to access social media, doing so in a manner in part inspired by McLuhan's (1964) approach towards the effect of technology upon the given manifestation of our social actions and interactions. Crucially though, this will not be done from a technologically deterministic viewpoint, but, as mentioned above, will also be approached from a user-by-user basis, shown from the understanding and perspective of the user in order to unpack the role of the technology in their specific formation of an identity narrative. As well as an understanding of intertextuality and extratextuality affecting how users approach a text to complete a narrative, it is clear that there is also a need for an understanding of how technology used to access the platforms affects the user's contextualisation of the platforms, their understanding of their role on the platforms, and their completion of the narratives. Given this, this research will also explore and collect data on how the how the technology the participants use to access social media affects their social actions and interactions online.

Many of the criticisms of Actor-Network Theory (Latour, 2005) revolve around the unwieldly nature of the infinite web of relations that the ontological shift demands (Bloor, 1999). Critics hold that if everything is a series of relationship then practically conducting research into a subject is nearly impossible as the subject unfurls into relations both that it is formed of and that it plays a part in the formation of. To truly attempt to account for the ANT reality of a subject, a research would have to attempt to account for the entirety of the network that creates the ongoing and ever-shifting actor-

network. This is impractical at best and impossible at worst. Comic Book Theory however offers a happy middle ground. It provides an embrace of Barad's (2003) work in examining the boundaries of actor-networks that still examines the materially-heterogeneous nature of social reality, but that also enquire why these boundaries are the way they are, how these boundaries are negotiated, and what they exclude and include. Comic Book Theory as such embraces the necessary role of the reality of non-human objects to impact upon our perceptions, but also offers a practical method for accounting for the negotiation of agency in the creation of a narrative. For Kant, the noumenon reality of an object is separate and distinct from our perception of the object, which is not impacted by the reality of the object (Kant, 1998). For Comic Book Theory however this distinction is eluded as a purposeful focus is placed upon how a narrative reality is created by, and emerges through, the interaction between the reality of the physical and the human perception of this. If we are going by dana boyd's definition of social media as a phenomenon (boyd, 2015), then Comic Book Theory aptly helps us unpack the role of the noumenon *in* the formation of a phenomenon, affording the physical reality of the noumenon equal consideration to our perception of it.

Comic Book Theory offers a practical approach to unpacking the relationship between human, non-human, and in-human. In intertextuality and extratextuality it provides the user the space to consider a number of other elements that play equal roles in the creation of the location-specific narrative performances. It is the aim of this research to focus upon the effects of the specific locations in the negotiation of the narrative, thus this frame offers a workable approach to this concept. This of course cannot claim to fully unpack the unended Latourian network of relations that go into forming social identity performance online, nor does it claim to consider every element. Instead this study aims to account for a missing focus in Digital Sociology upon the very real and tangible impact of technology and design upon our social actions, interactions, and the performance that emerge through our use of

technology. Thus Comic Book Theory is informed ontologically by the sensibility of Actor-Network Theory and Barad, but acknowledges that to truly following an infinite web of relations is impractical and to claim to speak objectively to any true, thorough, and complete actor-network is practically impossible (Bloor, 1999). In many ways, and following the ideas of Barad (2003), it is the black-boxing of these actants, the creation of a presented whole formed of many actants, that should be the object of enquiry, not the following of infinite webs of unending relations.

Given this, this thesis proposes Comic Book Theory as a model that:

- Sees the relationship between design and human in online identity performances as always and inherently bi-directional and co-dependent, with both design affecting the user's framing and actualisation of social actions and interactions, and individual users understanding, contextualising, and acting in novel manners within this space

- Socio-culturally grounds the performances of identity in the user's specific background through the concept of closure, extratextuality, and intertextuality, thereby suggesting that digital duality cannot be maintained.

- Overtly acknowledges and understands the effect of the actual material and physical nature of these spaces in which people are acting and interacting as causal elements in the final identity performances, **but**

- Understands that each identity performance is unique and individual due to closure, thereby allowing for novel and individual interpretations of identity, and accounting for how different users, understand, experience, and contextualise technology differently. This provides a direct avoidance of the deterministic issues of McLuhan and others to understand that each user will realise the potential of technology in different ways, but that their uses will nonetheless be

guided and bound by the possibilities offered through the technology. The realisation of this will be unique for each user and informed by their socio-cultural background.

- Understands that the resulting identity performances emerges in a location-specific manner through specific nonhuman and human elements, and thus can be considered malleable, negotiable, and temporally specific.

- Establishes and interrogates the boundaries of identity created in a given social space in line with Barad's work on agential realism, questioning what narrative readings, actions, and interactions are excluded, and how these boundaries are (re)negotiated, realised, and/or flouted by users.

- Understands that individual identity performances can also circumvent design ideals to create narratives not considered or anticipated by designers.

- Understands that being social online involves more than just producing content.

- Places the emphasis of understanding the implications of the design choices made within the social spaces that the user is interacting in, on, with, and through upon the user, removing the researcher's interpretation of the designers' intentions in regards to design choices, and instead focusing the attention upon how the user contextualises, understands, and interacts with the design of the social spaces.

- Allows for a consideration of the role of technology in shaping engagement with social media

Reconciling Goffman, Foucault, Lefebvre, Latour, and Comic Books.

In this chapter I have presented a number of theoretical frames, ontologies, and perspectives to deal with the elements and issues raised by the research questions. We began by considering the concept of

identity in sociology, in particular, focusing upon the work of Goffman and his research into the identity performance, settling the focus of this research as an analysis of socially produced, presented, bound, and conceived identity performances. Using a post-structuralist grounding drawn from the work of Foucault, we saw how Goffman's dramaturgical frame allowed for an understanding of the complex relationship between social situation and identity performance, but that Goffman's work did not allow for a detailed account of the impact of space and setting upon the realised and actualised identity performances.

Therefore, Actor-Network Theory was introduced as an ontological frame that demanded the grounded and contextualising of social analysis within the physical realities within which it manifested on a case-by-case basis. Actor-Network Theory provided a useful ontological frame through which we could begin to unpack the relationship between Discursive social ideals and structures, individuals, and design elements. However, although Actor-Network Theory provided a useful ontological framing and grounding of the situation in which social actions and interactions emerge, it did not provide a useful frame through which to understand the relationship between human, non-human, and discursive elements. It also presented the possibility of an endless web of actants that influence identity performances that would be impractical to follow. As such, Barad's (2003) work was introduced as a manner to embrace the boundaries of actor-networks and to make them the focus of enquiry.

From this, a model was needed that combined these many aspects into a workable consideration of how platform specific identity performances were negotiated online. As such, Comic Book Studies was presented as a frame through which Comic Book Theory could be developed, and through which the analysis of identity performances could focus upon how the user understood and negotiated design

elements of the social spaces in which they were acting and interacting, as well as how these social

spaces guided, shaped, and encouraged the actualisation and realisation of identity performance.

Comic Book Theory provides a framework that allowed a consideration of the relationship between

human, non-human, and discursive elements, and highlights the manners through which humans and

non-humans enmesh to form a cohesive ongoing narrative. Comic Book Theory also re-grounds and re-

introduces the attention towards the role of the design and the choices made by the designer, but with

the analysis of how these elements are negotiated and understood drawn from the perspective of the

user. It also allows for a consideration of how the creation of these identity performances are shaped on

a platform-by-platform basis by the user's closure, utilising socio-cultural elements through

extratextuality, and intertextuality to make sense of the presented designs. This process however is in

part guided by elements of design, which present certain preferable narrative readings and suggested

interpretations, though these are negotiated in an individual manner by each user. Using Comic Book

Theory as a guide, this research intended to view social media platforms as not just texts for analysis,

but 'comics' from which a narrative emerges, with the aim that this will provide a potentially deeper

understanding of how many aspects online are bought together, and how the audience and design

interact through and with the media form to create a specific and platform-dependant reality.

The focus of analysis will be upon how each user understands the design of the sites, how this design

shapes, guides, and encourages the performance of certain narratives, and how the user, technology,

and platform design co-actualise an individual narrative of identity. This research will examine how each

user draws upon extratextual and intertextual information, both on and offline to complete this

narrative. As such, the identity performance will be held to be contextually bound, but will be

understood as drawing upon other narratives, experiences, and understandings of the user. Given this, this thesis will now move on to consider how best to methodologically approach understanding identity performances online in line with the proposed Comic Book Theory.

Chapter 4 - Methodology

4.1. Ontological & epistemological positioning; situating identity and establishing the subject.

As mentioned in the previous chapter Actor-Network Theory is often misunderstood in that, as Latour himself highlights (Latour, 1999), Actor-Network Theory is potentially mis-named. Latour suggests that it is perhaps best not to think of ANT as a theory, but as an ontological shift away from a consideration of just human action in a non-human world, instead viewing the action that emerges as the result of the enmeshing between human and non-human (Latour, 1999), or the result of intra-action as Barad (2003, 2007) terms the emergent result of the enmeshing of heterogeneous elements. Similarly, Latour offers little useful advice in terms of a workable methodological frame through which to unpack this emerging actor-network. Latour (2005) does however offer some vague words to those who wish to undertake research with an ANT-inspired approach, suggesting that to successfully map an actor-network, researchers must follow the actors themselves in order to catch up with their often novel uses and innovations, and to learn from them what the collective existence has become in their individual and specific hands. Latour suggests that researchers should aim:

> *"to follow the actors themselves', that is try to catch up with their often wild innovations in order to learn from them what the collective existence has become in their hands, which methods they have elaborated to make it fit together, which accounts could best define the new associations that they have been forced to establish"* (Latour, 2005, 12)*.*

This perhaps aligns Latour's approach towards ANT research in a practical sense with the Agential Realism approach suggested by Barad (2003, 2007), in that Latour is suggesting that we account for how the actor-network has been actualised in a specific locale. As such we can begin to ask, in line with Barad, what has been discarded and disregarded from that specific iteration of an assemblage, therefore

asking what constitutes that specific actor that we observe. This approach gains particular resonance when we consider Comic Book Theory, which specifically and purposefully focuses upon this notion of an individually created identity performance which is nonetheless guided by design elements. The proposed Comic Book Theory suggests the object of enquiry should be how the individual has 'filled in' the gaps, focusing upon how this closure is guided in part by design, and how it is guided by their own individual socio-culturally crafted and contextualised extratextual and intertextual ideas. As such, Comic Book Theory similarly focuses upon how the specific iteration of identity emerges from the enmeshing of an individual human and the specific non-human locale within which they are acting and interact. Such an approach therefore demands a consideration of identity performances on a platform-by-platform basis to understand each iteration of identity.

In this regard then, Agential Realism and Comic Book Theory (and to some extent, ANT), ground and situate knowledge within local experiences. As such, Comic Book Theory suggests, in a similar manner to ANT, that the actor should be the object of enquiry. This thesis holds that this localised knowledge of the resultant emergent specific identity performances is best gained from the individual who has had to negotiate, comprehend, and reconcile these elements to produce the performances. Given this, this research aims to unpack this negotiation, this closure, and aims to understand how the closure is guided by design, as well as gaining an understanding of which elements (extratextual and intertextual) are used to complete each identity performance.

In terms of practical methodological approaches, ANT has been criticised for potentially lacking boundaries in regards to the actors that can be followed and that can form part of the network of an actor-network (Bloor, 1999). This is in part exacerbated by the lack of a clear delineated methodological approach other than the purposefully vague 'follow the actor' (Latour, 1999). In practical terms, ANT's

mantra of follow the actor means not ruling out any actant and not affording undue attention to some actants over others. Due to the intertwining and headily continuous web of relations that ANT opens up, this could mean following obscure and unexpected actants, and potentially falling down a rabbit hole of continual and never-ending relations in the rejection of boundaries. Barad's (2003, 2007) approach however offers a practical solution to this, not embracing boundaries per se, but making them in part the objects of enquiry. Rather than ignoring boundaries to chase infinite webs of relations and influences to a never ending spiral of networks, Barad suggests that we should embrace and pay attention to the boundaries constructed around objects and events in the world, arguing that these boundaries serve to tell us about what is being included from this reality, and what is being included. The objects of study in part for an Agential Realism approach then are these boundaries that are created. Whilst Barad (2003, 2007) appears then to agree with Latour in a post-structuralist manner that these boundaries are not given, are not fixed, and are created for a purpose, she does not suggest that we ignore them, but instead suggests that we should enquire why they are drawn, what they reject and exclude, and what they serve to include and enforce.

In such a manner, Barad rejects the infinite web of relations as the path to follow, but instead asks what constitutes the boundaries that are created in that specific locale. This too is an approach that Comic Book Theory attempts to take. The objects of enquiry here are the online identity performances. Rather than following the many manifold actants that may play a role in shaping the identity performances, Comic Book Theory shifts the focus towards how the boundaries of identity performances have been created within the specific locations. As such, it enquires; what design elements constitute the identity performance; how much information and narrative help is provided to the user through design; how much space the users are given for individual closure; how the user understands and approaches their role in creating a whole out of the juxtaposed format; what aspect of closure and what readings are

guided, encouraged, and enforced through design elements; and which aspects of closure are excluded or discouraged through design. In such a manner, it enquires how the boundaries of identity performance are negotiated and understood by the user, and how these elements are encouraged through design. It also crucially asks how these aspects may be challenged, asking how the boundaries have been understood, negotiated, and potentially tested by users. As such, rather than unpacking infinite influences and relations, Comic Book Theory concerns itself with the construction of the boundaries of identity performances, and how this is co-constructed by the user, technology, and platform design, with the influence of intertextual and extratextual aspects effecting closure.

Constructing a methodology.

With this in mind, the methodology adopted in the project attempts to deconstruct and evaluate the platform-specific online identity performances of the participants, focusing upon how the participants have come to realise and negotiate identity performances on and across a range of platforms and technologies. Given that the aim of this project was to understand how the identity performances of the participants have come to be through their interactions on, in, and with a range of social media platforms and technologies, the methodological approach revolved around interviews with the participants to understand how they had understood, negotiated, and navigated platform design, and how they presented and maintained identity online.

The interviews provided a useful method to explore and to unpack the understanding and ideas of the participants in regards to how they negotiated the various social media platforms to present identity, allowing for the exploration of individual cases of identity performance and the construction of individual narratives on a person-by-person, site-by-site basis. These interviews were initially supported

through the use of observation sessions with the participants which quickly became unfeasible for reasons detailed later in this chapter. This methodology adapted over time during the collection process meaning that the observation aspect was largely minimised in favour of longer and more in-depth interviews.

This project aimed to partially take and adapt Latour's methodological advice when he stated that those wishing to conduct ANT-inspired research should "follow the actor" (Latour 2005, 12). Though this is often seen as a vague methodological framework from Latour that leaves many potential researchers unsure about what to expect and how to carry out research with a grounding in ANT (Bloor, 1999), I believe that Latour intended this to be the case; by not being prescriptive to a specific methodology and style, and by allowing a wide remit of approaches and manifestations of this mantra, the researcher is afforded a certain freedom to approach the complex network in a suitable manner for each case. Indeed, when dealing with such a wide, expansive range of potential actors that can be elicited through an ANT approach, narrowing one's methodology down can be rather restrictive and may lead to the researcher missing some crucial actants (Law, 2009). This being said, in terms of feasibility and practicality there of course needs to be some sort of structure when approaching the field for both the researcher and the participants (Kozinets, 2010). With this in mind this research adopted a methodology based around broad initial interviews which would become increasingly specific, guided by the participants' individual cases (Scollon & Scollon, 2004). In other words, this research decided to move the task of deciding which actors to follow away from the researcher and towards the participants, who, on a case-by-case and site-by-site basis, could decide what elements shaped and affected how they felt they presented identity. This was particularly useful give that, as mentioned in the literature review, this project made a point of not stating which technologies or social media it would be looking at as the aim

was for this to become apparent through each individual research case, guided by the participants as the research progressed.

As such, the focus of attention in this research was largely upon the participants (Flick, 2009; Smith and Osborn, 2015), with the aim to allow them to explain and explore their relationship with social media and the technologies through which they access them. Given the need to account for the participants' understandings and interpretations of their completion of the narrative, this methodological approach was largely inspired by interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). IPA in essence is less of a methodological framework and more of an approach towards research that concerns itself with understanding how a person comprehends and makes sense of a phenomenon within a specific context. As Smith and Osborn (2015) suggest, "the aim of IPA is to explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world, and the main currency for IPA is the meaning that particular experiences, events, and states hold for participants" (Smith & Osborn, 2015, 25). IPA is as such largely drawn from and applied to the realm of psychology to understand the world through the subjects' eyes, but has gained attention from the world of sociology (Gill, 2014; Houston & Mullan-Jensen, 2012; Osborn & Smith, 2015). IPA provides a useful tool and frame through which to understand social media use, particularly considering the approach of Comic Book Theory, which aims to understand how individual participant makes sense of the design aspects of social media and negotiate their role in the creation of an individual and personal narrative. As such the aims of Comic Book Theory are similar to IPA in that both approaches aim to understand how the participants make sense of reality. In this case, Comic Book Theory is being used to consider how the participants make sense of social media, to consider the meanings and interpretations the participants have of design, and to consider how the narrative reality is completed through closure.

IPA in essence is a largely ideographic approach that places emphasis and worth upon how an individual deals with an understands a given phenomenon, placing at the forefront of analysis the manner in which the participants unpack and approach phenomena. As such, Smith et al (1999, 219) suggest that the key understanding should be upon what the participants "think and feel" about the phenomena, not on describing the phenomena. This aligns nicely with the aims and research questions of this thesis, which intend to understand how the participants negotiate and understand their role in the narrative building of identity, and how this process is guided by the design features and by other aspects of intertextuality and extratextuality. This means in essence understanding how the participants negotiate these design features, how they view them, how they understand them, how they are affected by them, and what process they utilise to deal with them or to possible flout them.

As such, gaining the participant's understanding of the phenomena is of key importance in understanding how they unpack their role in the creation of the narrative and how they negotiate this role with the many other aspects of the platform. Such an approach is also key in attempting to understand what the participants feel the restrictions placed upon them by design are. Rather than assuming the restrictions placed upon the participants on a platform-by-platform basis, this thesis is keen to understand how the participants view the restrictions, what the participants view as restrictions, how much they see the restrictions as restrictive, how much of a negotiation the creation of identity was, how they negotiate the ongoing process of identity presentation, and a range of other issues that rely upon understanding the thoughts and approaches of the participants individually. Given this, most of the worth and substance of the data in this research is to be found in the opinions and thoughts of the participants as they describe their interactions with, through, and on social media platforms. Therefore, an approach is needed that prioritises the voices of the participants. It is key therefore that what is presented is not my understanding of how this has been negotiated, nor what is

being negotiated, but that instead we gain an understanding of the participants' approaches and understandings of the phenomena of social media. The methodological approach therefore was designed to give a platform to the voices of the participants as much as possible, in an effort to remove the researcher's "own personal interests and expertise" (Smith & Osborn, 2015, 29).

Smith and Osborn (2015) do suggest that in order to attempt to approach and analyse research inspired by IPA there are a series of methodological tool that can most suitably unpack the participants understanding of phenomena. However, they are quick to point out that "there is no single, definitive way to do IPA" (Smith & Osborn, 2015, 25). Some successful attempts have been made, for example, through the use of personal diaries and accounts (Smith, 1999). However, Smith and Osborn (2015) suggest that the best tool for understanding and unpacking the participant's understanding of and approach towards a phenomenon is through the use of semi-structured interviews. This is confirmed by other researchers such as Brocki and Wearden (2006), Alexander and Clare (2004), and many others (Murray & Harrison, 2004; Reynolds & Prior, 2003). Such an approach allows the researcher to respond to the answers and responses of the participants, adapting the interview to suit the specific unique situations of the participants. Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) highlight that semi-structured interviews can "elicit rich, detailed, and first-person accounts of experiences and phenomena under investigation" (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014, 10). Indeed, a more adaptive semi-structured approach allows for the participant to be positioned as "the primary experts" (Alexander & Clare, 2004, 82), and the adaptiveness of the response affords the interviewer to probe the specific situation and reality of each participant. The exact details of the interview process are detailed later in this chapter.

Further to collecting interviews a number of researchers suggest IPA inspired interviews are best analysed and presented through the use of axial coding (Alexander & Clare, 2004; Smith, 1999; Touroni

& Coyle, 2002). This approach, detailed later in this chapter, helps unpack the common themes and ideas present in the interviews whilst allowing for the participant's voice to be expressed. In essence, axial coding requires the researcher to process the interviews and highlight key themes and ideas to present as findings. To further verify the coding, the initial coding was checked with the participants to make sure that the interpretation of their ideas and thoughts was truthful and credible from the perspective of the participants, as suggested by Pierre and Jackson (2014). As Trochim (2006) suggests, "participants are the only ones who can legitimately judge the credibility of the results" (Trochim, 2006, 2).

The remainder of this chapter will lay out and discuss the methodology that was used to explore and examine the emerging identity performances pursuant to the established research questions.

4.2. Participants and sampling.

Smith and Osborn (2015), in regards to IPA research, highlight that as the researcher is attempting to give priority to the voices, reasonings, and experiences of the participant, that such an approach should draw upon a small sample group, and that the aim of such an approach should be therefore "to say something in detail about the perceptions and understandings of this particular group, rather than prematurely make more general claims" (Smith & Osborn, 2015, 28). They highlight therefore that such an approach needs to show:

> *"commitment to a detailed interpretative account of the cases included, and many researchers*
> *are recognising that this can only realistically be done on a small sample - thus, in simple terms,*
> *one is sacrificing breadth for depth"* (Smith & Osborn, 2015, 29).

As such, a sample size of 10 was chosen to allow suitable depth, with the understanding that a large

amount of detailed data would be produced with this number of participants. During the collection

period, one of the participants decided to withdraw from the study, and therefore the final sample size

was 9 participants - 3 males and 6 females, between the ages of 15 and 27. This sample size was chosen

as it would also allow for individual cases to be dealt with in detail, as well as larger themes to be

unpacked and compared through coding of the interviews. The original sample size of 10 was also

chosen to allow for a realistically manageable amount of material as well as a large enough sample for

rich and deep understandings of their experiences (Clearly et al., 2014; Fugard & Potts, 2015). Between

8 and 10 participants is highlighted as an appropriate sample size by Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) and

Turpin et al. (1997) for IPA inspired research as it allows for deep consideration, with enough space for

comparison and thematic analysis. As Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) highlight, a sample size of around 10

"offers an opportunity to learn a lot about the individual, his or her response to a specific situation, and

consider connections between different aspects of the person's account" (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014, 9).

As Collins and Nicolson (2002) suggest, larger sample sizes can lead to a loss of detail from the

researcher, noting that smaller sample sizes allow for deeper readings, meaning that the researcher can

take the time to examine "potentially subtle inflections of meaning" (Collins & Nicolson, 2002, 626).

Further to this, other researchers using IPA inspired approaches have described samples of larger than

12 participants as not only potentially unwieldy, but also unnecessary as the researcher is likely to

achieve data 'saturation' (Turner et al., 2002); at which point no new useful themes are likely to emerge.

Though, as Broki and Wearden (2006) highlight, saturation is a problematic concept, especially when

approaching each participant as unique case studies of the iteration of identity performances.

Nonetheless, for the purpose of this research, a sample of 10 participants was deemed to be a suitable

amount to cover a wide array of issues whilst still allowing the data to be manageable, and allowing for

some discussions of common themes emerging through coding.

Further to this, Smith and Osborn suggest that an approach should utilise purposive sampling rather than random sampling, as this approach enables the research to gain useful participants that reflect and represent a specific group. As Brocki and Wearden (2006) highlight in regards to IPA research, "in IPA the aim is to select participants in order to illuminate a particular research question, and to develop a full and interesting interpretation of the data" (Brocki & Wearden, 2006, 23). As such, they suggest that participants should be broadly homogeneous where possible and practical, in line with the aims of the research.

This however presents a problem when considering social media. As discussed earlier in detail, a definition of social media is often complicated and covers such a broad and growing spectrum of participants. Social media is a broad and quickly expanding field with a range of users utilising the platforms for a range of reasons. As boyd (2015) highlights, social media is more than the sum of the term's parts. In this case, the social aspects of social media, as discussed in the literature review, are many and varied. Added to this is the notion that researchers should not be prioritising only those who post content alone, but that there are many reasons to utilise and participate with social media, including many 'passive' users of social media that often get overlooked in digital research, but who nonetheless interact with and through social media in interesting, common, and noteworthy manners. This is particularly noticeable given the range of options available to social media users, and the literature that highlights the importance of participation beyond content production alone. Barnes (2015), for example, notes that consumption and 'passive' engagement holds equal importance and should be equally focused upon during consideration of social media. Indeed, some suggest that content production is an a-typical use of social media. For example, (Bright et al., 2014, 14) iterates this point in

their discussion of social media, arguing that "a handful of users contributing extensively to the sites, whilst the majority contribute rarely or never".

Nonetheless, a range of approaches have been taken towards detailing and selecting perfect participants for rich data collection in online research. One of the most used has been proposed by Robert Kozinets (2010), who detailed a list of 6 criteria for perfect participants in online research. Kozinets' (2010) list of criteria for the perfect research participant was designed for macro studies of digital interaction online, but nonetheless can and has been utilised as a sampling guide generally for participants in online research across a range of approaches (Adjei et al., 2010; Belz & Baumbach, 2010; Chan & Li, 2010; Leek et al., 2016; Rokka, 2010; Van Hout & Hearne, 2015). Kozinets (2010) proposes in his list of criteria for the perfect participant that their use of social media and technology should fit six criteria:

1) Relevant to the research question

2) Active participants; recent and regular to enable the analysis of rich data

3) Interactive with a flow of data between participants

4) Substantial data, with a large mass of communication and an energetic field

5) Heterogeneous, with many different participants

6) data-rich with detailed a descriptive data.

When initially undertaking this research I originally aimed to find participants who filled as many of these criteria as possible, hoping that interactive participants that produced a wealth of data would allow for a discussion of social media that was informed by substantial experience in content production. However, it quickly became clear once I began talking to participants that whilst Kozinets' (2010) guideline undoubtedly aids researchers in finding data rich communities and users that produce a

wealth of relevant data, the list of relevant criteria is nonetheless restrictive and bias in its favouring of a particular type of user. In the initial interviews, the participants began discussing the myriad ways they had of using the internet as a social space, of the plethora of methods, tools, and techniques at their disposal for interacting and acting online, and of the vast variety of their approaches to selecting and uploading appropriate material. Certainly, not all of the potential participants fitted Kozinets' brief. In particular, there were large disparities in how substantive and data-rich their updates were, and how 'active' the participants were. Participants discussed, for example, the ways they used Facebook to 'stalk' their friends and family without actively engaging with them, or the ways in which they considered themselves a part of a YouTube community just by watching the Videos and Vlogs of certain YouTube personalities, without actively commenting on the posts.

Certainly, these participants didn't fit the initial Kozinets' checklist of useful and ideal traits, but I decided very quickly that I should not just dismiss their usefulness as participants for digital research as doing so would effectively dismiss the worth of their myriad interesting uses of these social spaces that shaped the manners in which they presented identity, mainly in order to find participants that produced rich and plentiful data over deep discussions about their use of social media. Therefore, I quickly reconciled that their uses of social media were worthy of study and attention, and that their techniques for engagement were just as interesting and worth of study. As such, after initially attempting to adhere to my criteria, I quickly decided that clearly a more flexible approach was needed and that, of course, the wide-ranging uses of these social spaces deserved and demanded documentation, exploration, and consideration. Rather than deciding what constituted good 'active' participants, I decided to let a group of participants tell me their stories and their engagement with social media without defining what the

best use of social media is purely by the metric of plentiful data. Certainly, the data collected may not be considered data-rich in the sense that Kozinets implies, but nonetheless, this research was left with incredibly rich data.

Nonetheless, some practical guidelines were put in place to find participants who used social media frequently enough to discuss their identity presentations online. This study chose to focus upon a group of 15-27 year olds as participants. Currently young people represent the most active and the largest demographic on social media. Indeed, age has been suggested to be the strongest correlation of social media usage when compared to other factors such as gender, educational level, and household income (Perrin, 2015). According to recent data from Perrin (2015), 18-29 year olds are the most likely to use social media out of the above 18 demographic, with fully 90% using social media. This represents a staggering 78% increase from 2005 figures of the same age range, and represents a steeper growth in usage than that of the next closest age range, 30-49 year olds, with a 69% increase over the same time period.

Of course, even greater usage can be found amongst teenagers, who have been noted as key users of social media for many years now (boyd, 2014; Herring & Kapidzic, 2015; Lenhart, 2015; Vishwanath, 2015). Fully 92% of teens in the USA have been reported as going online daily, with the majority accessing the internet several times a day (Lenhart, 2015). As well as this heavy usage, 71% of teens use more than one SNS (Lenhart, 2015). Given that they are currently the most active user base on social media (Perrin, 2015) across a wider array of social media platforms (Lenhart, 2015), this research will focus upon 15-27 year old social media users. Fully, the final participants comprised nine 15-27 year olds with data collected over a 1-year period. This has been established as a key demographic for social media and technology use (Lenhart, 2015), and has been shown to yield a wealth of diverse data

(Davies, 2012). There is likely to be a variation in access to technology amongst this age range as well, though recent UK research suggests this age range is likely to be well versed in the technology (ons.gov.uk 2016). However, obviously not all young people use technology, and there may well be cultural/geographical/gender/socio-economic differences unaccounted for.

Further to this, this sampling of course cannot be perceived as attempting to make claims about broader populations. Indeed, this approach inspired by Comic Book Theory suggest that each individual will commit closure in unique manners and therefore whilst that act of closure may be universal as we attempt to make sense of reality, the manifestations of this closure can never be considered true representations of larger populations. Whilst closure will be guided by the design process, and whilst certain narrative readings are encouraged at the expense of others (in line with Barad's work in agential realism [2003]), the point of closure is that the process is largely completed in unique and individual manners. As such the aim of this research is not to provide claims for a broad population but to aid in the development of a theoretical frame through which we can examine and understand the creation and maintenance of identity performance online as emergent narrative constructions guided by design elements and closure. Given that social media is a quickly changing field with an increasingly broad scope of platforms (Lenhart, 2015), arguably no discussion of how identity is produced online can truly hope to be generalizable through data collection alone. It is this theoretical model that is aimed to be generalizable and applicable to how we interact with and through social media; the data provided as such aim to present unique and interesting iterations of closure, and of interactions with and through technologies, by which we can aim to understand how identity is emergent through the enmeshing of design, technology, and user.

As Brocki and Wearden (2006) point out in regards to IPA inspired research, "conclusions drawn are thus specific to that particular group and generalisations should be approached with caution" (Brocki & Warden, 2006, 24). Duncan et al., (2001) similarly suggest that such an approach cannot claim to aim for generalisability, but that data should provide insights into the topic at hand. This is confirmed by both Touroni and Coyle (2002), who argue that IPA inspired qualitative research should aim to advance knowledge through a series of small-scale projects, and Turner et al., (2002) who suggest that these methodologies achieve deep and specific knowledge. Similarly, Smith (1999) argues that:

> *"from an idiographic perspective, it is important to find levels of analysis which enable us to see patterns across case studies while still recognising the particularities of the individual lives from which those patterns emerge"* (Smith, 1999, 424).

As such, this thesis will practically balance a discussion of individual cases, and a comparison of emergent themes amongst participants, with an approach that aims to present a theoretical frame through which we can consider the manner in which identity performances emerge.

Participants were chosen via the 'snowballing' method (Ratner, 2002), with the initial two participants, chosen from known contacts, suggesting other suitable participants and so on. This provided several potential participants from which I selected the ten participants that I invited to participate in the final study. This process also allowed me to find participants who interact with each other, helping further my analysis of social performances and interactions as we discussed interaction with other participants when possible.

Five rounds of 30 minute to 1 hour interviews were conducted with the participants over a one-year period with the aim of producing 50 interviews. This time frame allowed me to observe new information every session and track the types of actions and sites the participants were using (Scollon & Scollon,

2004). The data was collected via written notes and recorded interviews with the participants (Smith & Osborn, 2015). This period was chosen as it allowed for the potential development of new modes, use of changing technology, and the use of different platforms. It was also chosen for practical reasons to allow suitable writing up and analysis prior to submission, allowing enough time to begin initial coding and to gain the feedback of the participants in regards to the coding before finally writing up the thesis. As such, interviews were conducted from Summer 2014 to Summer 2015.

4.3. Interviews.

Social research is based on the study of experience (Calndinin & Connelly 1994), which is best viewed by analysing a participant's interpretation of their experience. Interviews create an understanding of what is important to the participant and how they feel they present themselves and interact. In terms of composing a suitable approach towards an interview process that is aimed at understanding the opinions, ideas, and experiences of the participants, Smith and Osborn (2015) suggest an IPA inspired approach should entail the researcher adopting the position of "a curious and attentive but 'naive' listener as the participant unfolds their story in their own terms" (Smith & Osborn, 2015, 29). Such an approach is designed to allow the participant to explain and detail their understanding of the situation fully, and to probe their understanding of the situation. As such, and given the need to adapt the process potentially for each participant as they may experience and understand the phenomenon differently, Smith and Osborn (2015) recommend the use of semi-structured interviews when approaching such research. The process of semi-structured interviews has been shown to produce rich data (Stirling & Schulz, 2011), providing insight into the meanings and experiences of the participants (Al-Saggaf & Williamson, 2004). Smith and Osborn (2015) suggest as such that:

"this form of interviewing allows the researcher and the participant to engage in a dialogue whereby initial questions are modified in the light of the participant's responses, and the investigator is able to probe interesting and important areas which arise" (Smith & Osborn, 2015, 29-30).

This presents a particularly useful approach when considering and unpacking the understanding of the participants as it allows the researcher to be responsive and adaptive to the particular participant and their particular understanding of the phenomena. Structured interviews nonetheless present advantages that should be considered when approaching a methodology, in particular allowing for pre-coded responses and a greater control over responses in line with the research aims and the required data. However, as this research is concerned with understanding the ideas, thought and perspectives of the participants across a wide range of undetermined social media, structured interviews did not present a usable approach. As such the approach was adaptive to the participants and their specific manifestations of identity, taking into account the specific realities of the platforms they use, the technology they use to access them, and the specific iterations of identity that emerge through closure.

Similarly, as Smith and Osborn (2015) note, more structured interviews can restrict what is discussed and are not adaptive or responsive to the needs of the participants. Structured interviews may result in topics only being covered that the interviewer deems important, meaning they potentially miss aspects that the participant finds important. Smith and Osborn (2015) further highlight that with structured interviews "the interview may well miss out on a novel aspect of the subject, an area considered important by the respondent but not predicted by the investigator" (Smith & Osborn, 2015, 30). A less restrictive environment such as that presented through semi-structured adaptive interviews allows the researcher to maintain some control, but affords them the ability to explore concepts important to the

participant, moving into new and unexpected areas and topics. Indeed, as the participants had largely

varying experiences and realities in their use of social media and technology, ranging from joint family

computers to smart watches, and from Facebook to dedicated fan forums, blanket uniform questions

would not have been suitable and may have led to a number of questions that would not be suitable for

every participant's situation. Research conducted with an IPA approach allows for semi-structured

interviews to be responsive to each given situation, and creates a largely collaborative process with the

participant (Brocki & Wearden, 2006) which importantly emphasises and positions the participants as

"the primary expects" (Alexander & Clare, 2004, 82) of the situation which they are discussing. As such,

their perspective is vital to understanding the phenomena.

A looser approach allows the researcher to also respond to ambiguity and unravel complexity within the

responses of the participant (Morgan & Hansen, 2007; Rainer & Cropley, 2015; Sloan, 2010; Smith &

Osborn, 2015). This is particularly useful as this project decided not to define social media for the

participants but to let them explore exactly what social media meant to and for them. As Tracy (2013)

notes, when used appropriately, interviews are able to provide research participants with an

opportunity to discuss "their opinion, motivation, and experiences…or rationales, explanations, and

justifications for their actions and their opinions" (Tracy, 2013, 132). Semi-structured interviews were

therefore deemed useful for the aims of this project, in line with the research questions, to understand

the ideas, thoughts, and definitions of social media from the participants, and to meaningfully unpack

their experiences with these platforms.

In terms of the practical format and feel of the interview, Smith and Osborn (2015) note that

interviewers guided by IPA should attempt to encourage the participant to talk about the topic at hand

"with as little prompting from the interviewer as possible" (Smith & Osborn, 2015, 33), in order to allow

the participant to guide the interview. As such, Smith and Osborn propose 'gentle nudging' from the interviewer to keep the topic on track. However, this is not always practical and possible in all cases, and some prompts will inevitably be needed to elicit responses from participants. Given this, constructed prompts may provide a useful tool for guiding the interviews, as well as for providing some help to the participant in answering the question (Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Constructed prompts essentially provide some talking points for the key questions of the semi-structured interview, providing the researcher with a method to prompt further discussion or to draw discussion back to a relevant point if the topic has strayed too far (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). The suggested duration of IPA inspired interviews is around an hour (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014), though again this is largely dependent upon the participant, with interviews naturally differing from one another.

In order to conduct a semi-structured interviews, Smith and Osborn propose starting with general questions, with possible prompts if the respondent has some difficulties or does not understand the question. They suggest that the participant's responses to the initial open questions should guide the formation of follow up questions and discussion, following a process of 'funnelling' in which more specific topics are discussed in line with the participant's initial responses. Funnelling essentially allows the discussion to become more and more specific as the interviews progress onwards (Flick, 2009), purposefully allowing for the specificity to grow out of the participants' initial response to the question (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). As such, each session can choose to focus in on different areas. In this manner, the interviews drew loosely from the concept of 'lightly structured depth interviews' (Wengraf, 2001), which suggests asking participants at the first round of interviews a general set of questions to then prompt new and unplanned questions that further explore and probe some of the avenues opened through the original responses. Such a method allows for an individual specific conversation to emerge

around the general subject area, an allows for a detailed and comprehensive account of the individual's experiences to emerge (Barriball & White, 1994).

Further to this, semi-structured interviews allow for adaptation to the initial questions in a post-interview reviews after the initial interviews with the first few participants to address any issues or noticeable problems that may have emerged, aiding any future interviews (Smith & Osborn, 2015; Wengraf, 2001). In a similar manner, Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) suggest the use of a 'warm-up' discussion with participants prior to the main interview to get participants use to the interview situation and to elicit a comfortable environment for ongoing discussion. They also suggest approaching the interview as a conversation with the participants around the subject, and that the structured questions should "facilitate a natural flow of conversation" (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014, 10). This was utilised in the interviews along with a funnelling process to guide the discussion towards the participants' specific identity performances and interactions with and through social media. As such, the interviews were largely guided by the participants' responses to early open questions about which social media they accessed and how they accessed this social media, so that each participant could play a role in shaping the interviews for their own specific needs. However, there were be some themes and methods utilised for all interviews, as detailed below. These were utilised partially to provide structure and a set of comparable answer, and partially to probe into some key aspects in regards to identity presentation online.

Verbal Protocols.

To provide further structure, the early sessions also included 'verbal protocols' (Young, 2013), where each participant viewed some of their online profiles/social media platforms along with the researcher,

describing their key content, uses, features, and construction. This was done where possible in a space where the participant could access these profiles on the technologies they generally used to upkeep them. This also therefore provided a prompt for discussions about the use and merits of the technologies they utilised to access social media, allowing for a discussion of the role of technology in identity performances. The questions generally revolved around why and how the participants generally used these sites, as suggested by Young (2013). This allowed for insights into the participants' views of the important aspects of the social media platforms, and showed the meanings they attach to various aspects of the platforms through their interpretations, emphasises, and definitions. This allowed for an evaluation during the interview of which aspects of the site and of their online identity were important to them (Young, 2013), how much control they had over the identity performances, and how specific actions were amplified and/or reduced. It also allowed for consideration of findings that I had not noted, making the research rich and reflective to the participants' ideas (Kvale, 2007). This also helped me consider strategies of resistance and possible methods of changing and challenging the suggested identities and methods of interaction.

Film script analysis.

Adding to verbal protocols (Young, 2013), further questions and techniques were utilised to allow for the exploration of identity performances during the semi-structured interviews. For example, discussion of the participants' understanding of the nature of identity performance were in part prompted through asking participants to describe their profiles as if someone was making a film script from the information on them (Robards & Bennett, 2011). This 'film script analysis' consisted of asking the participants to describe the sort of film it would be, what would happen, and what people would say and think about them. This was a useful technique as it encouraged discussion of performance in a creative way that

saved face by de-personalising the question away from directly asking how the participants were performing (Robards & Bennett, 2011). The 'film script analysis' as such provided insights into the identities being performed, the audience that participants felt they were performing for, the modes of identity performance, and how successfully participants felt they were performing. The participants were prompted during 'film script analysis' to focus upon issues of context, modality, and identity performance (Robards & Bennett, 2011), to ensure that ideas about design and context specific iterations of identity could be unpacked.

Given the focus upon unpacking and detailing the performative choices and how they might be interpreted by an audience, 'film script analysis' was particularly suited to the performative nature of social media (boyd, 2011). This process helped with the consideration of Comic Book Theory, as through a discussion of an ongoing plot that could be constructed from the information, participants were asked to actively and purposefully consider the narrative flow of their profiles. By exploring this process, I aimed to actively unpack the nature of the closure committed and how much this was affected by design. The 'film script analysis' allowed for a look at how the participants viewed their role as a user in this interactive media form, and how they viewed the technology, the design, and the media form in the creation of a narrative performance and construction. The findings from these various methods helped provide an in-depth and measured consideration of how a materially heterogeneous, platform specific identity is emergent and how it is maintained through specific actants interacting with each other.

Interviews were conducted in a suitable area in which the participant felt comfortable (Warren, 2002), often in an agreed public location, or in the house of the participant. As Edwards and Holland (2013) attest, and indeed as the theoretical frame drawing upon the importance of location would highlight, the micro-geographies of the interview environment may well effect how we act and interact in

interviews. As such, this project aimed to provide participants with a safe and comfortable environment

in the hope that it may make them feel more comfortable in contributing their thoughts and ideas

(Warren, 2002). I introduced myself to the participants earlier than the start date of research to ease

my presence as a researcher and to attempt to lessen any mitigating potential 'observer effect'

(Monahan & Fisher, 2010). By making the participants feel at ease with my presence as a researcher I

aimed to produce useful data that was not diminished by my presence (Speer & Hutchby, 2003). Each

participant was interviewed in person 5 times in an informal and semi-structured manner with

interviews recorded to create flowing conversation and allow responses to events and answers arising

during the interviews (Speer & Hutchby, 2003).

4.4. Observations.

Originally, this project aimed to conduct dedicated observation sessions alongside the interviews, during

which it was hoped that the participants could be observed using their social media on the technology

they normally accessed it on. This was done so as to view their interaction with technologies and to

allow the participant to demonstrate their typical use of a range of social media. This was partially

chosen for ethical reasons as well, as I would not be a participant on the sites viewing all their content,

but instead would afford agency and choice to the participants in what they showed to me. This would

allow me to observe what they thought was important, interesting, and useful for the discussions

elicited through the interviews.

Unfortunately, after the first few interviews it became quickly apparent that observation sessions would

be largely untenable, and would not be collecting useful or natural data. This was for several reasons.

Firstly, the technology used to access the social media was often, though not always, in the form of a

personal mobile phone. This meant that to observe their use of social media, the observer would have to practically be uncomfortably close to the interviewer. This would potentially increase the observer effect (Krueger et al., 1996; Nadelhoffer & Feltz, 2008) leading to unnatural and largely staged uses of social media.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly for the findings of this research, many of the participants suggested that long dedicated social media sessions did not represent their browsing and viewing habits with social media. Routine activity is important to observe when considering identity, use of interactive features, and social interaction. Observing routines helps avoid creating skewed data that isn't truly representative of the culture and also allows for an understanding of how the spaces are fully utilised, as well as how identity is portrayed and expressed through multiple modes (Bernard, 1998). It was hoped that observations of the participants' uses of social media would allow me to see what aspects of the site were most used and how the sites were routinely accessed (Scollon & Scollon, 2004). In order to attempt to view this, I asked the participants to talk about and show me their daily routines on social media whilst I sat and observed them. However, it became quickly apparent that the participants tended to not view social media in this manner, instead viewing social media several times a day in short burst, not for long, dedicated sessions. It was noted that the participants chose to quickly browse feeds and check update in their spare time. This often amounted to a quick cursory check of one or several of their social media applications on their phone, not, as originally conceived, longer sessions of browsing and interacting. This meant that practically observing their daily routines was largely untenable as their routines were sporadic and intermittent.

Though this created some problems with the original designed and proposed methodology, this research suggests that this is useful information for future researchers, as it is worth accounting for and

considering the role of social media in the participants' everyday lives. In this case, the role was one of occasional checking and browsing, with updates posted at chosen moments. The participants and their uses of social media were not, as originally conceived for this research, and as aimed for with Kozinets (2010) proposal of ideal participants for digital research, users who produced a lot of content and were constant and active users. Instead of producing a lot of content, which Bright et al (2014) suggest is a-typical of the majority of users, the participants produced a lot of data in the form of discussion about their use of social media and their habits. Users were not constantly on social media in a traditionally-conceived active and participatory manner, but were nonetheless utilising social media in a noteworthy and interesting manner.

Given the emergence of untenable observation sessions, a question was worked into the subsequent semi-structured interviews to discuss how the participants used social media normally in their daily life so that we could begin to unpack their average use and interaction with technology, and how they positioned themselves as users of social media. A short and more interview-grounded staged version of these observations were also worked into the interviews in the form of 'verbal protocols' (Young, 2013) in which the participants walked through some of their social media accounts, highlighting which aspects were important to them. This helped guide the discussions of the interviews, and helped highlight any discrepancies in my assumptions about the participant's use of social media (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2002), as well as adding the views of participants as experts in the field (Smith, 1999). The openly staged interview-based observations also allowed me to probe further into themes in later interviews that arose from these discussions (Flick, 2009; Wengraf, 2001), helping create a considered formulation of interview questions, and allowing the interviews to be shaped by the actions and interactions of the individual participants. This therefore further helped create interviews that were

responsive to the participants and allowed for useful and deeper discussion of the mediation, actions, and interactions observed (Kvale, 2007), in line with the adopted ethos of IPA (Smith & Osborn, 2015).

4.5. Data Analysis.

One of the larger issues that can be raised through an IPA approach is the notion that what is being recorded is in essence the researcher's opinion of an issue, only one step removed. In other words, there is a danger of a 'double hermeneutic' approach (Keith, 1992; Packer & Addison, 1989) in that the researcher is twice removed from the issue, trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of the world. Nonetheless Smith and Osborn (2015) suggest that an IPA inspired approach should concern itself with attempting to understand and give a fair representation of the participant's view of the world.

In order to do this, analysis was based around attempting "to make sense of what the participant has experienced and this analysis must always be grounded in the actual words of the participants" (Smith & Osborn, 2015, 29). However, Smith and Osborn also highlight that analysis will inevitably "be informed by one's own personal interests and expertise which are bought to the reading of the text" (Smith & Osborn, 2015, 29). Given that coding and analysing interviews relied upon interpreting the words and ideas of the participants, it was decided that in order to attempt to remove of as much of my own voice as a researcher as possible whilst still describing and analysing the interview, follow up interviews with the participants would be conducted to check and verify my coding, and ask for their input and critical thoughts towards my interpretation of their ideas (Pierre & Jackson, 2014; Trochim, 2006).

In terms of other metrics of reliability such as validity and reliability (Brinkmann, 2014), this research potentially faces some weaknesses as the repeatability of the findings is largely questionable. Indeed, this is a common issue taken up against IPA inspired research (Golsworthy & Coyle, 2001). However, this research is attempting to capture a moment in time, not a repeatable finding. Indeed, it could be argued that all social media research is largely temporally bound, as highlighted in the discussions of the definition of social media in the literature review. social media evolves and changes at an often quick and unpredictable pace, with new affordances and designs added frequently, and with new technologies to access these platforms on. Slight changes such as the addition of GPS technology (Erikson, 2010; Saker, 2016) can change how we act and interact online in manifold unforeseen manners. Indeed, if we adopt a Goffman (1959) inspired approach, identity too is a changeable and variable concept that is purposefully adaptive and flexible, bound to a particular moment and place whilst drawing upon larger socio-cultural expectations. As laid out in the theory section, identity is largely contextual, born of specific contexts and specific moments in time where specific aspects are drawn upon and utilised to perform identity. Therefore, it is through the process of coding and analysis that this thesis aims to unpack and understand the participants' subjective reports in order to test and strengthen the theoretical framework detailed in the last chapter, and to provide insights into how young people's identity performances online are emerging through their interactions and negotiations with specific iterations of socio-cultural influences, technology, and platform design. As such, an IPA-inspired approach cannot aim for objective accounts of the situation (Flowers et al., 1999) but must aim for a subjective report on the situation (Smith, 1999). Similarly, any narratives recorded are very much bound to that moment in time. As Trochim (2006) highlights, "if we are measuring twice, we are measuring two different things" (Trochim, 2006, 2).

Brocki and Warden (2006) in regards to IPA inspired analysis, note that *"analysis requires close interaction between analyst and text: the analyst seeks to comprehend the presented account whilst concurrently making use of his or her own 'interpretative resources"* (Brocki & Wearden, 2006, 27). Whilst there is no specific method of analysis suggested in the literature on IPA inspired approaches, a commonly used method is through the use of axial coding (Alexander & Clare, 2004; Osborn & Smith, 2015; Touroni & Coyle, 2002).

Axial coding is defined by Corbin and Strauss (2008) as "a set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, 96). Axial coding essentially comprises of breaking the interviews down into emergent themes and issues from a close reading of the interviews, before putting these categories back together to make connections between the categories, in essence allowing the participant's voice and ideas to emerge into common themes (Boeije, 2002). The key aspect of axial coding then is the re-organisation of coded data into larger emergent themes, creating groupings of data that are conceptually similar (Saldana, 2013). Once individual themes have been extracted by the researcher, Fade (2004) suggests that "the next stage is to look for connections between the themes in order to cluster them together in a meaningful way" (Fade, 2004, 649), in essence, compiling larger emergent over-arching themes in each case. Smith and Osborn (2004) suggest that the best approach is to establish and look "for patterns between cases with the aim of establishing the master themes for the group as a whole" (Smith & Osborn, 2004, 234). As such, Smith and Osborn (2004) suggests that this stage of creating larger emergent themes out of each case should aim to provide an attempt "to forge connections between these themes and establish superordinate themes for the case" (Smith & Osborn, 2004, 234). This approach to coding as such has been utilised effectively by IPA inspired researchers as a manner to both

detail the participants' thoughts and ideas on phenomena and importantly to provide deeper analysis of

comparisons and ideas emerging between participants in line with reviews and analysis of extant

literature and wider theoretical grounding (Collins & Nicolson, 2002; Smith, 1999; Turner et al., 2002).

As mentioned above, to help improve validity and accuracy of reporting in regards to an accurate

presentation of the participants' thoughts on the phenomena in question, once the original thematic

coding was established for each case, the coding was verified, confirmed, and checked with the

participant to see if the interpretation of their ideas and thoughts were accurate and representative

(Pierre & Jackson, 2014; Trochim, 2006). In terms of practicality, it is suggested that IPA research should

take care in the production of themes to ensure that they are reflective of the transcripts and the ideas

of the participants, particularly noting that themes should not be selected only on the basis of the

prevalence alone (Brocki & Warden, 2006). Instead the theme selection should also consider "the

manner in which the theme assists in the explanation of other aspects of the account" (Brocki &

Warden, 2006, 29). As such, researchers should attempt to remove bias as much as possible in the

selection of themes for analysis (Collins & Nicolson, 2002; Smith et al., 1999). A number of IPA inspired

approaches (Flowers et al., 1997; Kumar et al., 2012) suggest that this should be reflected in the

presentation of data, with verbatim extracts of transcripts providing a "grounding in examples" (Elliott

et al., 1999, 30). Nonetheless the axial coding process involves some amount of input from the

researcher to identify and draw out emergent thematic ideas and concepts. Therefore, compared to

other coding methods such as open or selective coding which present coding as discrete categories, axial

coding actively embraces the role of the researcher in the interpretation of the data, allowing the

researcher to play an active role in (re)presenting larger emergent themes that speak to the extant

literature and theoretical frame. Whilst this can be seen as problematic as it involves a lot of researcher

interpretation (Kendall, 1999), axial coding does not shy away from acknowledging and openly admitting

the role of the researcher in the interpretation process which is largely present in other coding methods. Instead, axial coding actively acknowledges that the researcher is required to interpret data in some manner. As such, axial coding positions the researcher as the expert in the field, and allows them to use their expertise, knowledge of the field, and theoretical ideas and positioning to draw out larger relevant themes in order to speak to larger points and ideas. Nonetheless, axial coding should attempt to accurately reflect and represent the ideas and thoughts of the participants (Smith & Osborn, 2015).

In order to confirm the validity of the coding, follow-up interviews with the participants were utilised after initial coding in which we discussed my coding, examining if it was an accurate representation of their thoughts and ideas. This is known as 'member validation', in which the participants are asked to critically assess the researcher's understanding and coding of their ideas and thoughts (Seale, 1999). Similar approaches to validation have been utilised in other IPA inspired research and have provided a more accurate reading and representation of the participant's ideas and thoughts (Alexander & Clare, 2004; Osborn & Smith, 2015; Touroni & Coyle, 2002). The aim is not therefore to provide a "singular true account" (Osborn & Smith, 2015, 69), but "to ensure the credibility of the final account" (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). The final presented topics of this research were chosen partially due to word limitations, and also due to the topics that best reflected the themes of the thesis (Smith, 1999). A chart showing the progression from open coding to axial coding and theme selection can be found in the appendix of this thesis.

4.6. Ethics.

Ethical procedure.

Listed below are some of the ethical concerns that were considered during the application process. Ethical approval was granted for this project by the University of East Anglia's Education Research Ethics Committee on July 31st 2013.

Consent, parental involvement, and online & offline interactions.

Though online research is a relatively new field, ethical research has been a heavily discussed field both amongst researchers and in wider fields. Large amounts of research have emerged under the banner of Internet Research Ethics to tackle the issue of ethical treatment of participants (Buchanan, 2006; Kozinets, 2010; Light & McGrath, 2010). Much of these ethical discussions revolve around information gathered online from public sites with a lack of face-to-face meetings or offline engagement with participants. However, my identity as a researcher was not hidden from the participants, instead I actively engaged face-to-face with the participants to see how they understood and viewed the co-construction of their actions and interactions. This focus, and the active role of expert afforded to the participants (Smith, 1999) allowed and encouraged an open and fully disclosed tie to the participants during the research period, further allowing for the open knowledge of my intentions and a definition of the data I was looking for well in advance with all involved parties. By initially using participants known to me through pre-existing offline contacts, using 'snowballing' to select my participant sample (Ratner, 2002), and allowing the participants to choose what data to discuss at each session, I was able to be open and honest about the data I was accessing and what I would do with the data. This process also required regular feedback and interaction with the participants and their guardians during the data collection and analysis to insure that all parties were happy and informed (Scollon & Scollon 2004).

Stern (2004) suggests meeting with the parents of the participants offline and informing them about the research allows a full and frank discussion and understanding of the research and its aims. Stern (2004) also suggests meeting offline rather than only accessing data online will ease the informed consent procedure and allow for a growth of trust to be established. All participants and their parents/guardians were fully informed of the aims of the research and my presence as a researcher. They had the opportunity to ask questions about the research during and after the sessions up until a pre-decided date during the analysis process. As previously mentioned, all data was collected in person offline, with participants choosing whether or not to show me their profiles.

All participants and parents/guardians signed consent forms that were presented in an intensive initial interview to make sure that they fully understood what was being asked of them and what information I was asking for and accessing in order to assure them of their control over their public data and which data I had access to and to reaffirm why I would be accessing it. The initial interview provided the opportunity for me to introduced myself and the research, fully explaining and making transparent my intentions and responsibilities, and allowing for any questions to be answered and considered. Participants required additional parental consent to take part if under 18, and I fully informed the parents of the research and information I would be accessing. I also made myself available for any questions they wished to ask during the course of the study.

All data will be presented anonymised and no images or traceable signs of the participants will be shown in the findings to protect the participants' identities. All recorded data was deleted post-analysis and all recorded interviews were deleted after the transcription. The participants were made aware that only my research supervisors and I would have access to the raw data. Users were told explicitly that they

were in charge of the recording device during interviews and had the ability to stop or pause the interviews at any time they chose. They also had complete control over what public data I saw during the verbal protocols (Young, 2013) and were reminded that the process was not mandatory and that there would be no repercussions for choosing not to show me their public profiles and social media accounts.

Anonymity, traceability and identity.

All data collected was anonymised and pseudonyms will be used during data presentation to protect the identity of the participants and their families. Previous researchers in online communities have anonymised names of their participants which have later nonetheless been traced (Dibbell, 1998). Therefore, care must be and was taken in protecting the identity of the participants to the fullest and best level possible. Pseudonyms are used, and were pre-agreed with the participants to protect their identities, particularly with regards to social media platforms such as Facebook, where real names are often used (boyd, 2014). Only information produced and provided by participants was analysed. Any interactions directly written to or from a non-participant contact shown to the researcher during the verbal protocols (Young, 2013) were disregarded, in essence providing a consensus model of interaction (Herring, 1996) and protecting those not involved in the research and not aware of the research.

Illegal or harmful information or activity.

Participants were explicitly informed that any information they did not wish discussed or analysed could be removed for any reason without questions. If I, or my supervisors felt the data collected was harmful in any way, we made sure that we could remove it from the study immediately and could potentially discuss the data with the parent/guardian. Provisions were also made so that of any illegal activity were

witnessed I would report it to the parents or relevant authorities. This was made clear during the initial

interviews, and the participant and parents/guardians were given a chance to raise any questions and

withdraw from the study if they were not comfortable. I also made clear to the participant that I would

report any illegal activity to the parent, guardian, or appropriate authorities (Stern, 2004). Many parents

and guardians are also noted as being present on these sites and platforms (boyd et al., 2011), and as

such would potentially have access to all the public data of their child that I may access during the verbal

protocols (Young, 2013), which further helped deter any potential harmful/illegal activity.

5.1. Axial coding themes.

To begin the discussion of the themes and ideas that arose from the remaining interviews I will start by briefly introducing the nine young people who participated in the research.

Brandon: At the beginning of the round of interviews, Brandon was a 26-year-old white male, living in the south of England with his girlfriend, and working in accountancy. He frequently described himself as optimistic and happy. He used Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, and Instagram at the start of the research period, and joined some forums towards the end specific to his interests in motorbikes. He accessed these mainly through either a phone or a desktop computer.

Brian: Brian was a 26-year-old gay white male living in the south of England, and working at a university as a research assistant. He had a broad range of interests and spent a lot of his time with his research. He used Facebook and Twitter to produce content, but also regularly accessed a wide range of other platforms for reading, posting content, and discussing issues. Brian accessed these platforms across a range of technologies, including phone, tablet, laptop, and computer.

Isabel: Isabel was a 25-year-old white female living in the south of England with her partner, and working in sales. She mainly used Facebook and Twitter, but also noted that she used WhatsApp, Instagram, and Snapchat on occasion for a variety of reasons. She described herself as 'bitchy', blunt, and acerbic, but loyal to her friends. She accesses these platforms almost exclusively on apple devices, usually an iPhone and an iPad.

Kirsty: Kirsty was a 24-year-old white female living on the south coast of England, and worked in the communications department of a charity whilst writing and publishing poetry on the side. She described herself as often whimsical and bubbly. She mainly used Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn at the start of the research, and accessed them on her phone, laptop, and work computer.

Molly: Molly was a 17-year-old white female at the start of the research period. She had just sat her final exams for her A-Levels at a school in the south of England and lived at home with her mother, her step-father, her step-sister, and two brothers. She described herself frequently during the course of the interviews as a shy person, who spent a lot of time following her hobbies of dance and music. The research period coincided with several key events in Molly's life; turning 18, leaving school, going to university, and moving away from her family. She used Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat during the research period and accessed these from a smartphone, a laptop, and a shared family computer.

Nina: Nina was a 21-year-old white female living with her partner in the south of England after just moving out from her parent's home. She worked in construction and regularly used Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, and a musical theatre forum. Indeed, she had many hobbies and was frequently busy fulfilling interests in music and culture and helping her local community. She accessed these platforms on a range of devices including work computers, desktop, laptop, and iPhone.

Oliver: was a 21-year-old white male living with his girlfriend in the south of England. He was working in a primary school and training towards being a teacher. He described himself as geeky and spent his free time playing videogames and watching TV. He used Facebook, Twitter, and Reddit regularly, and accessed these through a PC, and phone, and an iPad.

Sally: Sally was a 21-year-old British-Asian female, living in the south of England in her parents' house. She was in her final year of university at the beginning of the research period, studying anthropology, and used Tumblr, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram across several devices. She described herself as geeky, and obsessed with fandoms, and spent much of her free time updating Tumblr, reading books, and watching TV.

Willow: Willow was a 24-year-old British-Asian female living in the south of England. She worked in a local office as an office assistant and accessed her social media via her phone, laptop, and computer. She was shy and geeky, and suffered from mental illnesses that often affected her social contact. She spent her free time indoors reading and playing videogames. At the start of the research period she used Reddit, Facebook, and Twitter regularly.

The use of axial coding has led to the emergence of several key themes and sub-themes that present pertinent ideas for this research. Full transcripts of the interviews can be found in the Appendix. In this chapter, I will focus on interpreting these key themes emerging from the coding. These themes broadly revolve around (i) the technology used to access the platforms; (ii) the manner in which social interaction online was understood by the participants; and (iii) the manner in which they interacted with the platform designs to produce social interactions and identity presentations.

5.2. Technology.

The Medium is not the Message - Technology changing uses and experiences of Social Media.

Amongst the participants there appeared to be no uniformity in regards to their experiences of technology. All of the participants utilised a range of devices to access the different social media platforms they used. These devices were discussed during the interviews and it was apparent that the use and experience of devices were largely different for each user due to their situation, their needs, and their preferences.

Nonetheless, the participants did discuss a range of ways in which technologies changed and augmented their experiences of social media and discussed the role that devices played in creating particular interactions with and through social media for them. Brian for example discussed how his social media usage and experience changed when he switched from an Android phone to an Apple phone. He notes that the two technologies had some difference in usability:

> *"Android was so much easier to interface between Twitter and Facebook, and you could have (.)*
>
> *like, I found I had more control with Android over where things went, than with Apple. I think (.)*
>
> *Apple is easier to use for some people, but (.) they're so different."*

And later expands upon this, noting:

> *"I can't find something that is individual enough in the app creation, the layout of your*
>
> *tweetdeck or whatever you're gonna use, like I can't find something that I feel comfortable with*
>
> *cos you're just, it's Apple, you have no choice. Umm. I think a lot of it is a lot easier to use and*
>
> *more intuitive, but yet I don't like it. It's quite clinical".*

Brian continues from this to note that his usage of social media changed with the introduction of a new device, specifically detailing how the lack of flexibility in Apple's design led to some frustration and ultimately an unwillingness to use Facebook through his new Apple phone:

"Android, because it's such an open platform, people can be really clever with it and do what they want with it. Apple, you have a use and that's it. And so you can't control it. Android you can find the app that suits you, find a nice little niche, and work with that. So I found that I am actually using Facebook from my computer more and I, I, I am using my phone less".

The change in technology then from Android to Apple had changed Brian's engagement with social media. Crucially however, the interview data suggests that it is important to contextualise the effects of devices to each user, as the effects will evidently not be universal. This was made apparent by Brandon, who also noted he had used both Apple and Android devices, but found little discernible difference between the two. Brandon responded to questions about his usage and engagement with the two devices with less concern that Brian, noting when asked if there was a difference:

"P: No, I think probably fairly equally across the different phones, just because I've known how to get at them and they've all been very easy to access.

I: Even from Apple to Android? Was that a big shift or?

P: No, not a huge shift to be honest".

Instead of changes caused by a shift from Android to Apple, Brandon noted other changes in his usage driven by different technology, specific to his needs and his situation. He specifically highlights the changes brought about by the addition of a better camera:

"since I've had a smartphone with a good camera there's been a bigger shift in terms of the way I use it, I certainly now use Instagram a lot more because I have a good camera available to me and I don't have to use my separate camera, go home, upload my photos, and then put them into the internet. I can just click it from my album".

Brandon also noted other particular changes in social media usage and patterns bought about since gaining a smartphone. He noted for instance that he could more easily diversify his use of social media with the addition of a phone:

> "I think my habits are possibly changing because previously I'd only have bothered with one sort of social media site and the other two that have come along sort of Snapchat as well if you include it have been purely since I've had a phone and I've got access to all of them at the same time".

In a similar fashion, Sally noted some changes between different devices as well, with her usage patterns and access times changing after an upgrade in phone:

> "On my old phone I couldn't even access Facebook, I had to break it, because my phone was complaining, umm, so when I went out during the day I'd end up going for about 6-7 hours at a time without accessing social media, but now with my new phone I kind of access constantly even when I'm out with friends. So I'm always checking Facebook or Tumblr or Instagram".

She also later noted some additional differences bought about by gaining a functional mobile phone, particularly highlighting the addition of emojis as a communication tool:

> "I think it also helps that emojis are on phones now, but you can't get that (.) it's limited on the actual websites, whereas on your phone you have the standard ones, and then extra ones you can download from the AppStore or Google. I've started using emojis a lot, I don't know whether it's good or bad but I've started to think in emoji's, like 'this emoji perfectly describes my reaction here', I wish I could react with emoji's offline".

Similarly again, Kirsty also discussed the changes in her use of social media and her feelings of connectivity since upgrading her phone:

> "Well the phone I had before was, well, as my boss at the time flatteringly said, a dumb phone, because it was the literal opposite of a smartphone, I mean it was as close to a Nokia 3310 in this day and age as you could probably get, it literally did nothing…it just didn't have the power to use any kind of site. I mean, none of the phones I had before this one had apps or anything, so yeah, I umm, in some ways I've lost a significant part of my life to having a smartphone now, because I am on call all the time, umm, I certainly, did I even have Twitter before I had a smartphone? I did, but I never used it really. Now I'm on it all the time."

Kirsty later detailed some nuanced and interesting differences in how she used and approached the platforms bought about by the technology she was accessing social media on. She noted that her time spent on the platforms had changed noticeably since gaining a smartphone:

> "I had Twitter but very rarely used it, I think every now and again from my laptop in bed when I was a student, umm, err, and I did have Facebook (.) I checked it less often (.) I suppose when I did check it I would be on it for longer, because by the time you'd bothered to boot up the computer you might as well hang around and talk to people for a while, whereas now I just tend to sort of dip in and out more. So actually in some way I suppose I haven't necessarily lost time to Facebook, it's just allocated different".

Given this, it appears that technology can discernibly change the manner in which the user engages with social media. In Kirsty's case we can see technology changing and impacting her use and experience of social media platforms. Similar issues when changing between PC and phone were noted by other

participants. For example, Willow discussed some individual differences in the style and manner of her interactions on different technologies. She notes:

> *"I'd be unlikely to link to, to like post to a friend's wall with "oh have you seen this" on my phone, because it's harder to do it. It'd be more likely to be something I'd do on my pc. Also, I'm more likely to engage in longer conversations on messenger and stuff over my computer, because it has a proper keyboard and it's easier and you can keep the thread of a conversation better, than on my phone where it's harder to type, I'm much more likely to just do like tiny little yes that's great and all that sounds good and y'know we'll see you then kind of things on my phone. Umm. Yeah, I tend to read stuff, read messages on my phone and then reply to them on my desktop".*

Again though it is worth highlighting that it appears that the medium does not affect users in the same manner. Instead, individual users enmesh with technology to produce specific engagements guided by, but not universally bound to, the affordances of that specific piece of technology. Whilst some participants, for example, discussed how their usage of social media noticeably increased on a mobile device, for others, the differences between devices were not nearly as clear-cut. Nina, for example, notes that an iPhone is *"easier than the actual desktop layout"*, but only in a rather perfunctory sense that a user can *"just scroll easier with your thumb, and you can just like stop it when you want to read something, rather than like getting the mouse up and down. I just, I find it quicker"*.

Further to this, participants also suggested there was a need to situate technology use as it may change based upon where the user is at any given time. Isabel discusses this, detailing how she would use her devices differently based on where she was at the given time. She notes *"(h) my boyfriend has stopped me checking my phone at home. I like it actually, I can just be with him so I put my phone down and we*

just hang out". It would appear then that technology needs to be not only considered on a user-by-user basis, but also potentially situated when considering how and why it is used.

The interviews suggest therefore that a deterministic approach to technology should not be taken, but that instead research should aim to understand the unique and unfolding role that technology plays within each user's life. The changes technology creates in terms of interaction were not noticeably uniform within this sample, appearing to be unique to each user. Though larger research samples may be able to discern some trends in usage, this research suggests that there is a need to purposefully problematize this and consider the role of technology within the user's life. Sally noted of Facebook for example that "*it's easier to browse other people's pages on your computer than it is on your phone*" whereas Nina, found the iPhone "*easier that the actual desktop layout*". Indeed, some participants who used multiple technologies noted little-to-no difference between them. Isabel for example found no difference between her iPad and her iPhone. Similarly, Brandon noted that of his multiple devices that "*aside from the slightly lack of functionality on my phone, I think I use them in virtually the same way*". Molly noted only some minor changes in her usage of social media bought about by a change in technology after gaining a laptop for her 18th birthday. She suggested "*it's really great and I (.) I use it a lot now. In my room and whatever I can leave things up and it's not (.) a problem*". However, she also noted that her engagement and uses of social media platforms were not dramatically changed, especially in terms of a shift in her content production given that she continued not to post on social media that frequently, even with new technology.

Given this, it appears that individual users will utilise technology in highly personalized ways, bringing their own extratextual and intertextual issues to these platforms to create unique uses, which may be

guided by the features afforded by the technology, but which importantly will be realised in an individual manner. It is the enmeshing of the technological and the individual through which the individual usage emerges. These cases therefore serve as a reminder that usage of technology varies from person to person, and the individual experiences cannot be assumed to be universal. As research suggests, technology can and will be utilised in a myriad of often unique ways by users (Ariel and Avidar, 2015; Bar et al., 2016), and are responsive to the specific context and situation of the user (Chinn & Fairlie, 2010; Norris, 2001).

Platforms are not amorphous across technology; they are technology specific.

One aspect of social media engagement that was noted by participants was that social media platforms are not consistent across all devices. The manner in which Twitter, for example, is presented on a smartphone is different from Twitter on a computer, or a laptop, or a tablet. A number of the participants discussed this, noting that the preferred using certain devices due to the manner in which they presented the platforms. For example, Oliver, highlighted that:

> *"P: The only thing I make the exception to is Facebook, that has to be on computer.*
>
> *I: And that's because of the permissions?*
>
> *P: Nah, I just can't stand the app. I think it's a bit counter intuitive and hard to use".*

Brian also highlighted this difference, but he emphasised the reverse position, championing the merits of the application over the computer version of the platform. He noted that given a choice he would choose to access social media on his tablet. When asked why he responded:

> *"P: Because the apps tend to reduce a lot of Facebook down to (.) although Facebook does this*
>
> *now itself, anyway, but you like (.) you can't see as much on it and I like stalking people basically.*

I: That's really interesting, so you like it stripped down and less (.)

P: Less faff, yeah, I like to just see it as simple as possible. It's so much easier on my tablet, it's just the updates without any hassle"

This would suggest that beyond paying attention to the nuances of a range of platforms, there is a need to consider that individual social media platforms themselves may not be consistent and may vary based upon the devices that users are using to access them. Nina's interviews emphasise this as she highlights the difference between the presentation of different social media platforms on a Samsung phone compared to an iPhone. She notes:

"three Samsung galaxies that have broken. And I did use Facebook, and Twitter, and Instagram on that, but I actually used it a lot less than when I had my iPhone, because I found it harder to use, because it was more like the computer. Whereas Apple sort of had their own layout, but the Samsung, it was sort of the same as the computer and I didn't like that. So I actually ended up using my laptop more, than my phone, which I didn't like".

Not only did these differences affect how Nina accessed her social media platforms, they also changed the ways and the amount that she used the platforms. She suggested:

"I wasn't on it as much, so I didn't update anything as much, I didn't put as many photos up while I had it, because I didn't like using the camera on the phone. Because I normally just take a photo on the iPhone and upload it to Instagram, or Twitter, or Facebook, and just, you know, put a comment on it. But with the Samsung I didn't like taking the pictures, and I didn't like the layout, and I didn't like anything"

For Nina therefore the variation in the presentation of platforms across different devices changed how she used social media in a number of manners, including the style and regularity of her updates. Nina particularly highlighted the device-specific layout of the platform as an aspect that affected how she experienced the platforms. Willow too also noted different presentations of the same features on different technology. She highlights Facebook Messenger in particular as a being different on her phone as compared to on her computer, and suggested:

> *"Since Facebook did that and then made the stupid little box in the corner I actually prefer sending stuff from my phone than sending it from my Facebook, cos they make go through three extra steps to get it full screen on my bloody laptop".*

It appears therefore that there is a need to consider that social media platforms are not consistent across technologies, and that a user's experience of that platform may be bound to the particular device through which they are accessing it. If we are utilising Comic Book Theory and continuing the Comic Book metaphor, then this would suggest that the presentation of the juxtaposed aspects that the user has to engage with in order to commit closure and realise a complete identity narrative cannot be assumed to be consistent across devices. Given that Comic Book Theory holds that the presentation and organisation of design aspects may affect and guide how the user completes this narrative, this would suggest that there is a need to consider device-specific organisation of platform features when considering identity performances online. Indeed, as Nina's case showed, the presentation of social media on her Samsung devices led to her interacting in a markedly different manner. For Nina, the experience of a platform could not be assumed to be consistent across devices, and therefore her engagement with, and use of, the platform also could not be assumed to be consistent. Again, it is worth highlighting that Comic Book Theory suggest closure is enacted in an individual manner, and that this

engagement and identity narrative creation will vary from user to user as they engage with and through

technology in unique manners. Nonetheless, it appears care should be taken when considering platform

use, as this may well vary based upon the technology through which the user is accessing the platforms.

Devices can be tied to specific purposes.

A number of the participants suggested a marked difference between how they viewed and used

different technologies, noting that they reserved certain devices for specific purposes, in turn affecting

how they engaged with these devices. The interviews suggest that there is a need therefore to

contextualise and situate the technology that users have access to rather than merely noting their

access to that technology. Brian, for example, noted in his interviews that he would make use of

different devices to engage with different aspects of a social media platform. He discussed his use of

Twitter, noting that he would use his computer when possible to view the current trending topics on

Twitter, but that if he wanted to compose and send a tweet, he would tend to use a phone:

> *"I wouldn't feel right using Twitter on my laptop. I don't know why. It doesn't seem (.) Like, if I'm*
>
> *looking for a news story I'll go on Twitter on my laptop and find a trend. Because then you can*
>
> *scroll through all the tweets quicker. But if I'm tweeting it'll be from my mobile, because you can*
>
> *send a text or you can just literally just blup blup send to Twitter".*

Indeed, this notion of specific devices for specific purposes was not restricted to Twitter for Brian but

was considered across multiple platforms:

> *"So if I'm using Twitter (.) I would never use Twitter from a laptop, like never, I don't see a point*
>
> *in it, it's just a thing that you put on a phone, it makes more sense. Umm (.) Facebook (.) I don't*
>
> *know, it does actually feel nice to do it on your computer. It's a computer thing at heart, it's*

made for the computer, I think the apps have a lot of redundancy and they just narrow it down

into basically a Twitter format".

Brian later expanded upon his preference for using a computer when accessing Facebook, noting:

"I just feel like I want to take my time with my Facebook, I think, and when I'm on my mobile it

feels very quick and like I don't feel like I'm typing properly, whereas Twitter you can just go

blurp and it's on Twitter and I don't mind, but with Facebook I quite like to take my time with it".

He later expanded upon this, detailing why he specifically and intentionally reserved his engagement

with Facebook for a computer:

"Well, it's the whole sitting down and typing. It's feels more intentional, more of a (.) choice (1.)

umm (2.) I think the computer just feels more of a meaningful choice. It has weight to it (.) (h)".

Brian was aware that the specific technology he used changed the way he approached updating, and

therefore he reserved specific devices for specific purposes. The intentional notion of sitting down and

actively engaging rather than browsing meant he could interact in what he felt was a more meaningful

'weighted' manner. Brian later stresses the opposite point in regards to his usage of Twitter, noting that

he feels it redundant to access these platforms on a computer:

"You don't need a mouse and you don't need a screen for Twitter, if you're just tweeting

yourself, you don't care what anyone else is saying, and you're only following your replies to that

(.)"

So for Brian, specific platforms were bound to specific uses, and this reflected which technology he used

when accessing and posting on these platforms as he felt the different technologies carried different

connotations and merits.

Similar findings were noted by Kirsty, who noted that she'd use a computer for *"lengthy posting on Facebook"* and that she found Facebook "*really irritating"* on her phone, causing her to use it "*less and less"*. Brandon also noted that he assigned specific functions to specific platforms, highlighting that *"for sharing photographs I only use my phone, because it's much more convenient. It's very easy"*. Other uses of technology for specific purposes were also noted by Kirsty, who suggested:

> *"So yeah I don't tend to use my smartphone as much for Facebook any more, except to sort of scan what other people are doing, umm, but I do use it almost exclusively actually I use it for Twitter. I don't tend to use Twitter so much on other devices, as I say because the app is so simple and it's also capturing photo, cos if you're gonna tweet you might as well tweet a photo, and yeah capturing a photo on a phone is so much quicker than doing it and putting it on a computer and all the rest of the jazz"*.

Similarly, Willow noted her preference of specific devices for specific tasks:

> *"I don't use the Twitter client so (.) erm check Twitter from my (.) my computer only occasionally. Facebook mostly from my phone again but sometimes from my PC and Reddit is normally always from my PC. Once or twice I have read on my phone but not very often"*.

Some differentiated uses of technology were also noted due to the participant's feeling over the security of using a phone, meaning they restricted their use to PC only. For example, Oliver notes his usage of devices as:

> *"PC is Reddit all the time, and Facebook. I refuse to use the Facebook mobile app. Simply because it makes me, it wants me to install the messenger and I will have nothing to do with an extra app from Facebook"*.

This suggests that there is a need to consider that a platform can be used and reserved for specific purposes by the user which informs the technology they will use to access it. The interviews highlighted several occasions when a user's engagement with technologies was bound to and by their specific needs and situations. For example, Oliver details his preference of his PC over mobile phone given that his phone use is restricted as *"I have to remember how much data or usage it uses, because it keeps updating and checking and sending off messages and doing stuff, and I'm not on an unlimited tariff thing, err, yeah".* Oliver also notes that this is locationally specific for him. So that; *"At home, if I'm in front of my PC, I will obviously use my computer, if I'm lying in bed or wherever then iPad, if I'm on the go then it's phone".* Similarly, Sally notes: *"I use my phone more though, especially cos I'm out most of the day so a lot of the stuff I do is away from my laptop".*

Indeed, the use of specific technologies for a range of specific reasons extended beyond purely social media, with other factors also affecting how and why a user would engage with a given device. Brandon for example notes that, though he has a laptop, he uses it for dedicated purposes, and that he often would not use it for social media:

> *"Like I don't bother looking at Facebook or Twitter on a computer. If I'm at a computer normally I'm doing something particular. Normally I've gone there for a reason, and I've gone to the effort of finding my laptop charger and turning it on. It's a lot of effort just for Facebook"*

A similar usage is noted by Willow, who discusses her desktop computer noting *"when I'm at my computer I use my computer for actually gaming so I don't tend to use it a whole load for social media because normally when I'm at my pc I'm doing something".* Given this it appears there is a need to consider the specific context and situation of the user (Chinn & Fairlie, 2010; Norris, 2001) when

understanding how and why users utilise technology there is also a need to understand that technology may serve different purposes to different users and as such may not so easily be considered analogous.

The technology Molly used to access the social media platforms highlights the need to situate technology for the user, and presents some interesting issues in regards to her specific experience of social media. At the start of the research period, when Molly was still living with her parents, she had two different mediums through which to access social media. Molly had been given her own mobile phone at 16, which she uses as her main method of accessing social media platforms, and also had access to a joint family computer, which she said she used fairly frequently for a number of purposes. She described her usage of the family computer thusly:

> *"I could use it in the evenings. To "do homework" [she uses air quotes]. But mum would never (.) check on me, so I could do whatever I wanted really. It was upstairs, in the loft where my mum worked from home. We'd do homework there but nobody was really checking on me. But she could have easily. But like I say, I'm shy, so I didn't really put anything about me online. So I just checked Facebook and stuff. It was fine".*

Molly notes that she did prefer to use her phone for social media whenever possible. In the second interview when asked about the family computer Molly attested her preference for her smartphone when accessing social media noting when asked if she still used the joint computer to access social media *"Not really any more, no. not since I got the phone".* Later she reflects upon the joint computer, noting:

> *"(.) I kinda forgot how it felt before (h) they were (.1), like I was, there were times when I was (.) when it was so annoying like if my mum and her boyfriend were watching something online (.)*

our TV broke, so they used to watch online a lot. But if I couldn't, my phone was fine then. It was,

like my phone was for social media, the computer was school work and researching".

Indeed, Molly contextualises the technology, noting that she made use of them for largely differing

purposes. She notes "m*y phone was for social media, the computer was for school work, research on the*

internet and emails none of which were particularly interesting for me as an evening activity".

Nonetheless, in terms of pure functionality, Molly notes that there was little tangible difference

between the two technologies, mainly because she felt that as she was only browsing, the functionality

differences were not sizable. When asked about the difference between the two in terms of her

experience with social media she notes:

> *"well, like, seeing as I only look at them it's (.) kinda the same on the phone as the computer (.)*
>
> *but, like (.) it's easier. It's mine".*

Though in essence these two technologies may seem largely different, Molly's experiences of the

platforms whilst using the two different technologies were not vastly different. Though browsing

appeared to be easier on the phone, this didn't seem to be too large a deterrent from using social media

and the differences in terms of using the platforms for browsing appear largely perfunctory for Molly.

What does appear to be a deterrent however was the access to the machines and the manner in which

she contextualised the technology. Once we situate the technology and pay attention to its meaning and

context for the user, it becomes clear that, for Molly, the medium wasn't the message, the medium in

this case was merely a tool for accessing social media. What was important was the specific role she

assigned to that technology. Molly suggests that family computer was for homework largely. She

acknowledges that she would use it for other purposes including social media, but it does not appear to

be the main purpose she ascribes to the family computer as a medium, which she suggests numerous times was for homework. Molly suggests she tended to prefer using the smartphone for social media usage, mainly it seems because it was easier (*"the phone's easier because it's just in my pocket"*) and because she owned it (*"It's mine and I can use when I want without worrying"*).

Given this it appears that there is a need to consider the difference between 'having' and 'having access to' different technologies in terms of engagement with them. Care should be taken to not just note the platforms that participants have access to, but to understand that platforms may vary in function and contextualisation for the user as they approach them with different extratextual resources. This raises some questions for the treatment of technology in social media research. Lenhart's (2015) much-cited survey of social media usage reported to ask participants "whether they 'have or have access to' a list of five tools: smartphones, basic cell phones, desktop or laptop computers, tablets and game consoles*"* (Lenhart, 2015, 2)*.* However, these interviews suggest that we cannot assume that 'having' and 'having access to' technologies are the same thing. For Molly it appears they patently are not; the joint family computer was something she had access to, the phone was something she had, as she notes when she says "*It's mine and I can use when I want without worrying".* It appears therefore that technology is not a neutral machine used to access anything, it is situated and the users apply different approaches and purposes to different technologies, informed by their specific situations and needs. Here, in Molly's case, her joint computer was a family computer. Though she knew she could access social media on it, and that her experience of it may not be that different for the purposes for which she was using the platforms, she largely chose not to make use of it for that function. If we were to only consider her output, there is little noticeable difference between her engagement with the devices she chose to create content on either. However, if we explore her approach towards the devices and her use of them it is clear that there is some noticeable variation.

5.3. Social online.

Understanding social media - beyond Facebook and Twitter alone.

The interviews revealed a variety of platforms that were used by the participants for social interaction, suggesting the need to account for and consider more than just Facebook and Twitter when considering social interaction online. During the interviews the participants were asked what they considered social media to be. They provided a number of variable suggestions, some idiosyncratic to their particular method of engaging with social media. For example, Isabel provided the definition of social media as "*a way to communicate with your friends and acquaintances, I'd say. And a bit of a newsfeed to see what's going on in the world*", suggesting the notion that social media may involve more than just communication, and that in this case it was used for information gathering also. Brian too provided a definition informed by his particular use of social media platforms. He noted social media to be:

> "*P: Like, anything that has a forum or has avatars or profiles I consider to be social networking, in one way or another.*
>
> *I: Does that mean you use more than just Twitter and Facebook then?*
>
> *P: Umm. Yeah, I guess it does, I (.) I have a whole bunch of sites I use and post stuff on, but not (1.) not in any regular sense. I do post on a whole bunch of things though. Facebook and Twitter just feel a little bit more (.) overtly social. It's in your face kinda*".

Indeed, many of the attitudes towards social media expressed in the interviews appeared to reveal a hierarchy in the participants' consideration of social media that predominantly stemmed from their experiences of Facebook. Nonetheless all participants used a variable range of platforms; Brian used 2 platforms for content production, and browsed numerous other platforms. Brandon used 4 platforms

regularly. Isabel used 2 platforms. Kirsty used 3 platforms, Nina used 5 platforms, Willow used 9 that she discussed during the sessions, Molly used 4, and Sally used 4. All participants however used Facebook and Twitter. Brian seemed to hold Facebook and Twitter as separate for the manner in which they overtly revolved around social interaction, but nonetheless acknowledged that social media can be broad. Later he discusses engaging with and through more than just these two platforms, noting "*I use a lot of other websites, but, when you say social media everyone thinks Facebook and Twitter".* He further clarifies this remark, discussing how for him the distinction lay not in the social capabilities of the platform per se, but his personal level of engagement:

> *"P: I use a lot of them, but don't have an active presence. So things like YouTube, and Vine, and*
>
> *umm (.) I would go on but I would never contribute to them (.)*
>
> *I: So you don't consider that use of the sites?*
>
> *P: No, because I'm not actively giving to the site. I'm (.) milking the site. I don't think that, like (.)*
> *I would never use YouTube for its intended purpose. Well, I don't know, I use YouTube to watch*
> *videos, I suppose that's the intended purpose. But I would never put videos on there".*

Indeed, Brian later expands his list of platforms his uses to include Google+ and Tumblr. This suggests that Brian is aware of a range of sites, but only feels he actively contributes to a few. For example, Brian notes:

> *"I feel like you have to be more active. Like, I feel like, the same as YouTube, I don't use YouTube,*
> *I'm not a YouTuber, and I'm not a Viner or whatever the equivalent would be, I'm a, a, I watch.*
> *I'm a voyeur (h)".*

Brian however later does give some parameters to what he considers to be social media, again suggesting that Facebook is more explicitly social media. He details that he defines the boundaries of social media as not specifically including 'texting apps':

"P: I'm on, I'm social networking sites on my phone as well, WhatsApp, Grindr, those kind of things as well.

I: You don't consider that social media?

P: No, it is, but on a different level. It's basically texting".

It appears that for Brian social media is a broad field, but that there is some degree of definition with certain platforms that are more explicitly, traditionally, or overtly social. Other participants were noticeably more comfortable to express a broader view towards social media. Kirsty for example understood social media in a rather broader sense, noting her blog and personal website as forms of social media. She noted "suppose I have a website which technically to extent is a social media site, in as much as people can comment and get involved on it" as well as noting:

"I did have a LiveJournal account for a while, which I had a lot of interaction with the fandom community on there, which is a totally, but thinking about it, a lot of people that I knew through LiveJournal I didn't have any other contact with, so I guess in some ways that is a social media site".

For others participants however there were particular affordances that made certain platforms more or less social in their view. For example, Brandon noted that to him social media needed to contain a marker of 'identity'. He noted that "anything that is completely anonymous I would have thought is not

social media, just purely on the basis to me is putting some sort of name, whether it be your real name or not, or some sort of identity, communicating with some sort of identity".

Despite all participants utilising Facebook and Twitter socially, there were a broad array of other platforms for social interaction, particularly by some participants. For example, Nina used a wide array beyond Facebook and Twitter, including platforms like Pinterest and a musical theatre forum that she accessed frequently and used in a variety of manners. Willow too discussed several platforms that fulfilled social functions for her, detailing how she used two video-gaming services, Raptr and Steam, socially. She discussed that users were able to share captured videos of their gaming sessions and could live-stream their gaming sessions to an audience. She notes that on Raptr *"you set up a profile, you set a profile picture, you get a username"* and that it allows for *"tracking where I rank up against other people in terms of how much I've played".* Willow also discusses Steam, another video-gaming service which allows users to:

> *"s̲how you how much you've played in the last week, and it'll rank you up against your friends and up against the community as a whole. Like, how many, this is the average amount of hours you've spent, or sorry this is the amount of hours you've spent, this is the amount of hours your friends have spent, and this is the average amount of hours that the community spent playing it, like the average member of the community has played this game this week for like x amount of hours".*

Willow notes this can be particularly social:

> *"you add your friends, like people you know, or people you like talk to on forums, like steam forums, and play the same games in, like, people that maybe you watch stream stuff or*

something, or you've met online. So it, like, and Steam I always thought is more for meeting up

with people that you'd want to play with at the same time".

Beyond this, Willow also discussed comment boards, noting that they served as overtly social spaces for her. She notes that communities form around the discussion of certain topics:

"you don't really know each other, but because you're all talking about the same things in the

same context, you definitely get a feel of personalities…people will refer back to comment

boards from a couple of days ago, like 'oh yeah, you mentioned last article that your dog was

dying, how's that going?' or something".

She later notes one particular section where this social factor is explicitly encouraged and acknowledged in the comment boards that she uses:

"They, every, at the end of the week normally, they'll do what they call an open thread. Which is

'here is an article that doesn't actually say anything, other than comment in the box', like talk

amongst yourselves, basically. And there's a couple of other sites that do it.

I: I often wondered what that was. So, I didn't realise what it was.

P: It's basically, they just put up, like one a week normally, which is basically like (.) which is what

are you doing this weekend, what are you playing this weekend, which is basically just people,

just, talk. What are you doing this week, how are you, it's like, umm, tell us what you're on

about, how has this week gone for you, what have you been up to? It's like, because as I was

saying, even though it's commenting on an article, if you're regular enough people sort of set up,

maybe not in the same sense of community, but you kind of get to know people. Or get to see

people commenting all the time, that people are sort of interested in other people's lives."

Willow notes that for her, the social experiences and relationship that are formed in these comment boards are different kinds of social relationships, but nonetheless are still purposeful and often intimate. She notes *"despite the fact that you have no idea of anything, like, I wanna say personal, but I know some really personal stuff about all of them, apart from the fact that I don't know their names and I don't know, umm, anything"*. She highlights one case in particular of a woman who had been talking in the comment section about living with her partner's ex-mistress, Willow says she knew *"like how she feels about the fact that she has to put up with her husband's mistress, although they're not having a thing any more, and it's stuff like that, except I have no idea what her name is, where she lives, how old she is, anything like that. And it's just odd"*. These spaces then appear to fulfil different social functions and purposes, and provide different social experiences and understandings. Indeed, in a similar manner, and detailing the broad scope of social experiences facilitated through the internet, Sally also discusses how video games can serve social functions for her:

> *"Like games where you play with other people, like online role playing games, you can join groups or teams with their friends or just random people in general and they become friends…You hear of people starting relationships with other people who they've met online in video games and stuff. I've seen a bunch of discussions on games about literally anything under the sun, from cats and parenting tips and just telling stories".*

The data therefore shows that social media is a broadly different experience for each participant. Each gains different social experiences from the internet, responding to, enacting, and fulfilling different practice, needs, and experiences. Their understandings of social media, and therefore experiences of social media, appear largely variable. Nonetheless, it should be noted that Facebook and Twitter were used by all participants in some format, and appeared to be noted as the most explicitly social formats,

though again, with a variety of uses dependent upon a number of factors. Whilst Facebook and Twitter

are evidently popular, this research suggests that the use of multiple platforms is increasingly common,

and that, as suggested in the Literature Review, future research should consider more than just a few

specific platforms (Lenhart, 2015) when attempting to understand how user are using the internet to

socially interact and act. Indeed, Molly highlights a reason to consider a range of platforms when

considering social media, noting that:

> "I think other people use Facebook differently to other things, because on Facebook they only
>
> tend to be friends who they've actually met, but on Twitter and other ones lots of people follow
>
> sort of random people that they don't know".

For Molly, Facebook appears to be the exception to social media usage, not the rule. Despite its

popularity, Molly suggests it in some way acts as the outlier for social media usage, and that not only

should it not be considered typical of all social media, but that it may be a-typical of other social media.

This data suggests that multiple platforms are being used by young people, and that their social

experiences online can be broad and variable.

Different platforms, different social aspects.

Given that the participants were utilising multiple platforms at once, I was keen to understand how they

were using these platforms to socially interact, what being 'social' entailed on each platform, and

whether different platforms fulfilled and catered for different social aspects. As noted in my previous

research (Dyer, 2015), the interviews reveal that the manifestation of the 'social' aspects of social media

cannot be assumed to be consistent across all platforms and can be largely variable for users. It is noted

therefore that there is a need to understand how the social emerges on different platforms, as the social

uses and aims of a platform, and therefore the experiences of the user, may vary greatly from one platform to the next (Dyer, 2015, Zhao et al., 2016).

This variation in the social functions and uses of platforms was noted by the participants. In particular, the participants noted that Facebook and Twitter served largely different social functions for them. Brian for example noted that for him Twitter served as a platform where he expressed his professional self, and therefore highlighted that he felt he could not easily express other aspects of his identity because of this. He suggested "*I feel like I can be myself on Facebook whereas I can't on Twitter because it's professional*". Brian later expands upon this, noting the different social aspect of himself and different social connection represented on different platforms. He suggested:

> "*Twitter's celebrities and new sites. My work Twitter is people that are to do with my area of work, so notable scientists and journals and things like that. Facebook is all my friends and George Takei. Pretty much*".

Similar separations of social self were expressed by Kirsty, who suggests "*Twitter tends to be slightly more professionally focused for me".* Indeed, the interviews revealed that the participants' experiences of Facebook all largely revolved around interacting with family and friends, whereas Twitter appeared largely more flexible in who the users could follow, allowing them to explore and express a variety of interests and social aspects away from just family and friends, including careers, celebrities, and hobbies. Sally for example noted Twitter served different social realms, but rather than focusing upon her professional life, Sally followed "*authors, quite a lot of actors, umm, yeah mainly actors and authors, a few friends but not that many".* She further suggests that this separation of different social aspects of herself was largely purposeful, stating "*I've decided just to keep it to what I want to see and not really all*

my friends". Sally notes that the platforms therefore served and reflected different aspects of her

identity, stating *"none of them are like (.1) all sides of me"* and *"it's fangirl vs public personality, and they*

have different sites".

Interestingly, this purposeful separation was even noted when Sally was talking about the same topic.

She noted:

> *"I put gigs on Twitter and Facebook too, but on Facebook it's more to show my friends that I*
>
> *went to the gig and had an amazing time. It's like showing off to your friends vs getting*
>
> *attention from almost strangers on Twitter".*

A similar sentiment was also expressed by Brandon, who noted that his content could be consistent

across different platforms, but that it may serve different purposes:

> *"I think I keep it very separate, for the most part. I think the only exception would be if, for*
>
> *example, I had say, mostly an image I suspect, that I particularly liked the image in its own right,*
>
> *then I would probably put it up onto Facebook and also onto Instagram. But it would be in a*
>
> *different way, I probably put a lot more context and a lot more reason behind why I've taken it*
>
> *and why I'm sharing it on Facebook whereas on Instagram I would just put the image out there*
>
> *and sort of see what people thought really".*

This suggests that even when sharing the same content, the user may not be intending that content to

serve the same functions or purposes. This highlights an important point for research into social

interaction online, as it appears that merely noting the type of content shared (See Kim et al., 2016;

McCain et al., 2016) is not enough; content needs to be situated to the platform and the user to

understand the specific purpose it serves.

Of course, for some participants, it wasn't just the intent of the content that changed from one platform to the next, but the actual content itself. Willow for example noted of Twitter and Facebook that *"I follow vastly different people for different reasons".* She suggested that this often led to discussions and social interactions around vastly different topics with the two different groups, highlighting on example in particular: *"my Twitter feed was full of people tweeting about Ferguson, whereas on Facebook there was absolutely nothing, it was still people whinging about their normal lives".* Similarly, Nina also noticed some differences in the social groups represented on the various platforms she used, describing her Instagram following as "*complete strangers that I don't know",* Twitter as *"celebrities that I like",* and Facebook as, "*friends, and friends that aren't really friends but you used to know them and are still friends with them".* For Nina, this meant that whilst *"everyone on my Facebook I know in some way"* her exposure to wider variety of people on Twitter, including unknown contacts, lead to the topics of her content often being different:

> *"On Twitter I follow too many random celebrities, so I don't see my friends' posts, so I just post random things about, usually about what's trending? So I look at what's trending, like the Apple event, so I'll sort of comment on, like ooh iPhone 6 is coming out, whereas on Facebook I don't put anything about it, really".*

Again though, it is also worth highlighting that this was different for each participant, as they each engaged with the platforms in different manners for different purposes, committing closure in a unique manner whilst guided by the possibilities available to them in the design of the platform. For example, the differences in the platforms meant that, for Nina, she could communicate and socialise with new

contacts, rather than established contacts. Nina discussed how she was able to use Twitter to

communicate with users around their mutual interest in a given topic, noting that:

"The other day I put a post up about 'Neighbours', about an episode of 'Neighbours', and

someone from, I can't remember where it was, commented on it that I didn't know, and I replied,

and we started chatting about it, and them DMing each other about it".

This implies a potentially different sort of social function fulfilled through the platform. Rather than

communicating with shared contacts around what she was 'doing', Nina felt she could interact around

her interests with like-minded people. In a similar manner, Sally noted that some of the comments she

received in the comment section of her blogs came from users often with no discernible signifiers of

gender or age, but suggested that there was still a form of notably social connection around shared

interests:

"If you run a blog you start to know these people online to some degree. Like I can be scrolling

down my dashboard and I won't know some of these people's names or gender or anything in

general and it literally doesn't bother me because I know we like the same TV show or books. So

sometimes I'll scroll down and be like "there's so-and-so".

This suggests then that social interaction online covers a range of social experiences and interactions,

not only communicating with known contacts but also a potential wide range of users about a range of

topics and interests. As such, it appears that being social on social media can take many forms across

different platforms. This potential difference was summed up by Brian, who notes:

"P: when people add me I'm like well you're not my friend. I feel like friend (.) cos they use the

friend, not follower, I think that's a very (.)

I: It's a massive discourse. I think the use of the word friend as opposed to follower has a massive

visceral image to it.

P: I feel like 'do you wanna add someone as a friend', it's very different to you want to follow this

guy. Yeah".

Other participants similarly discussed their use of platforms to reach out to, and interact with, a group

of users with a shared interest, thus fulfilling, exploring, and expressing a specific social interest and

communicating around a single topic. A number of participants sought out specific platforms upon

which to do this in an environment dedicated to that topic. Nina for example detailed the use of a fan

forum for musical theatre, which served as a space for her where she could engage in specific

discussions around a given topic:

"it's a completely different community. It's mainly people my age, like 21, who are sort of into

musicals and into singing, and they post videos, and they get all these positive comments back,

basically, and it's really nice and you do get a few arseholes, but no, it's quite a nice little singing

community, and you get some really random chats going on about socks or something, you

know, like completely random, but it's just relaxing, sort of".

Similarly, Willow also discussed the use of gaming sites and platforms which foster social interactions

and discussion around videogames:

"For example Steam will tell you when your friend logs in and what they're playing, so if you, if it

was a co-op game you could then send them a message in Steam chat, without leaving your

game, being like, do you want me to come and join me, or shall we play a game".

Willow described this as fulfilling a particular social niche for her, allowing her to talk about gaming on a dedicated platform. She noted she could:

> *"meet up with your friends, play games, together, you can buy like a four-pass game, so that you can give, gift the game to your friends on Steam, it always feels like what I would consider to be social. Like nice social, around games and having fun".*

These platforms for the participants therefore allowed them to explore one interest exclusively with and amongst like-minded people, acting as space in which different social aspects of themselves could be explored and expressed. This again highlights the need for a broad consideration of what social interaction online entails.

The idea that different platforms serve and facilitate different social aspects of a user's personality was particularly highlighted during the film-script analysis, where the social aspects served online were linked by the participants directly to specific performances of identity. The participants were asked what sort of character they thought they would be if a film were made from the information of their profile. Nina noted that the platforms facilitated the expression of different social aspects of herself. On Facebook she'd felt she was a "*geeky nerd*", on Twitter she was *"a celebrity stalker*", and on Pinterest she was "*a wedding nerd"*. Similarly, Kirsty suggested that her identity was noticeably different across different platforms, suggesting that on Facebook she would be viewed as:

> *"it'd probably be Bridget Jones or something wouldn't it (h), like someone trying desperately to be both witty and funny and sort of someone being a bit up for life but probably getting it drastically wrong (h)!"*

whereas she felt her Twitter was:

"wolf of wall street sans the crack! (h) I like to think that that kind of the image that come

across, hard-nose professional sort of, but sort of aware sort of person".

These findings suggest that there are broad arrays of social interactions online across the growing range

of social media platforms (Davis & Jurgenson, 2014; Utz, 2015). The reasons for social interactions

differed across a range of platforms (Blank & Lutz, 2016; García-Martín & García-Sánchez, 2015). This

would suggest that it is important to highlight, as Wu et al. (2011) do, that online research must consider

multiple definitions of 'social', and not assume that one understanding of social should act as the

'default' use, or that other variations are not variations but deviations from the core. Social media

appears to fulfil an array of equally important social aspects for the users, and their engagements with

these platforms fulfil a broader array of social manifestations online beyond just networking with

established offline contacts (Barnes, 2015; Zhao et al., 2016). Of course, the exact nature of this is

unique to each user's given socio-cultural needs and their extratextual resources they bring with them

when approaching social media. For example, at the start of the research period, Molly suggests that

she only followed her offline established friends across all three platforms she used. Despite

acknowledging that Twitter was commonly used for following celebrities and engaging in discussions

around the user's interests, she suggested that this was not why or how she uses the platform. She

noted *"on Twitter and other ones lots of people follow sort of random people that they don't know. But I*

just want to see my friends". She later elaborated that she followed:

> *"P: Just my friends, on all of them it's just my friends, or if there's something, like I follow*
>
> *Casualty because I like watching it, so I like to know if it's not on or something.*
>
> *I: Is that on Twitter or on?*
>
> *P: On Twitter.*

I: Yeah, cool. So when you say friends, you mean people that know offline? Or do you meet people online and talk to them?

P: People who I know already, who I've like met face to face".

This highlights that despite the potential of Twitter to follow strangers, a fact noted by a number of researchers (Dyer, 2015; Marwick & boyd, 2011; Natali & Zhu, 2016), this potential is not always fulfilled by the users, who will bring different socio-cultural needs to the platforms to create social uses and functions. For Molly, despite Twitter potentially facilitating other social functions, she chose to engage with the platform in an individual manner inspired by her particular social needs, choosing to follow and observe different aspects of her friend's lives across a range of platforms. The social group that she was witnessing were consistent across the platforms, as was her usage of mainly browsing. However, importantly, the aspects of her friends' lives she was witnessing were different across the platforms. If researchers were just to observe the content that Molly produced across Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, given that she did not post much content online herself, Molly's usage and engagement with the three platforms themselves might appear to be fairly uniform. Molly noted however that they served different functions for her as the content she was viewing was slightly different on each site, meaning the aspects of the social lives of her friends that she was observing were variable across the three platform. She noted:

> *"Umm. Obviously on Instagram you have a lot more pictures than, cos that sort of what it's about, um, Twitter's more like things that you see at the moment, and Facebook's more like big events or like holidays, something like that. Yeah. So, they're kinda all for different things".*

Given that the platforms may fulfil different social needs for user and represent different aspects (See Dyer, 2015; Zhao et al., 2016), Molly's browsing of the three platforms to keep up with different aspects

of the lives of her friends suggests that forming a cohesive knowledge of a person may require

potentially looking at a range of platforms as they may facilitate expressions of different social aspects

of the user. This was highlighted by many of the participants who noted that they used different

platforms to explore and express different aspects of themselves, and to communicate with more than

just established friends and family around a range of topics. Molly's use of three platforms also

highlights that there is a need to look beyond content production alone to understand the role of social

media in the user's lives. This is a topic we will explore fully later in this analysis.

The interviews suggest that not only are young adults and adolescents using multiple platforms

(Lenhart, 2015; Zhao et al., 2016), but these platforms are performing a range of differing social

functions for them. As highlighted in previous research (Dyer, 2015), Twitter and Facebook often serve

and facilitate different social aspects in the lives of their users, making generalisations across these

platforms problematic. The interviews highlight the need to consider social interactions within the

platforms in which they emerge, and to consider that, though an array of platforms are social, they may

fulfil different social needs and aspects, meaning that potentially usage and engagement may vary. Of

course, again, this is realised in an individual manner by different users as closure is committed to

different effect through the enmeshing of individual user and platform, and as such, the specific

extratextual situation of the user needs to be considered to understand their specific engagements with

the platforms and the specific social aspects the platforms fulfil for them.

Context collapse.

Alongside the use of different platforms for different social purposes, a number of the participants highlighted that many disparate social aspects of their offline lives were often converging upon single platforms, causing 'context collapse' (Davis & Jurgenson, 2014; Utz, 2015), which changed the ways in which they were interacting and performing identity. This was often discussed in terms of the increased presence of parents and family on social media platforms. Indeed, amongst the participants there was even some suggestion that the majority audience on Facebook was now older users. For example, Kirsty noted:

> "I think the audience is growing in other areas purely because it's getting more accessible, so the older generation – I think the fastest growing group on Facebook now is the 65 and over category".

Brian also notes that older generations are increasingly present on Facebook:

> "P: Facebook's useful still. Especially for some demographics. Like I know older generations are really taking it up to keep in contact with their kids and family
>
> I: (h) do you have any older family on Facebook then?
>
> P: oh sure. Aunts and uncles and stuff, they're all on it. I think one of my aunts has 6 different Facebook accounts. (h) Why do old people keep setting up more and more accounts? (h) But it's useful for them, for sure"

Nina suggested this too, highlighting Facebook in particular as the platform that older generation are comfortable using. She noted "*my parents use Facebook; they don't use Twitter*".

Similarly, Willow noted of Facebook that:

> "the connections have grown so far and it's no longer your friends who you see at school, but also your mum, who you don't want to freak out, your co-workers, your in laws, your partner's family, your cousins, etc.".

It was noted by the participants that the increased presence of a wider audience than just their peers affected how they chose to act and interact, and what they chose to share. For example, Nina noted of Twitter that, as her family was less likely to use the platform "*you don't have to worry about what your family thinks so much*". Willow noted:

> "*I think back to what I was like at that age, and I think, if I had the people on my Facebook that I have now, like my mum and dad, my aunts, I probably wouldn't have said half the stuff I did. wouldn't vocalise it*".

Sally similarly suggested that her peer group interacted differently due to possible parental presence on Facebook. She noted that "*some of my friends (.) like at uni they don't use it for parties in case their dad sees it and gets angry*", and later noted that:

> "*I definitely think about my family and work on there that I might not want them to see TV shows or how much I like them or even just the few celebrities or male models that I follow*".

'Context collapse' was also an issue for Kirsty, who worked with social media for her job in communications. She noted that the audience largely affected how she thought about presenting herself:

> "*It was the end of the world when I added someone who I used to work with on Facebook who I got on with really well, I said yeah sure, added on Facebook, and of course because I'd added her all my other work mates then could find me and I had to try and explain to them that I don't add people that I work with on Facebook, I've slightly relaxed that rule but I've just got much much more careful about what I post*".

Here then we see Kirsty directly changing her manner of acting as a result of different contexts converging upon one platform. She later expands on this to note:

> "*Increasingly now that all my social media I think, bar none, is connected to someone I work with, so that kind of takes away the choice not to think about it [how I act].*"

Interestingly, Kirsty also discussed her use of LinkedIn as a professional social media platform, and noted a similar but reversed context collapse, discussing how non-professional friends were trying to find her and add her on LinkedIn. She noted that:

> *"Someone who last I'd heard was at the bottom of a barrel on an awful lot of drugs, tried to add me on LinkedIn and claimed to be an auctioneer and I'm pretty sure is a load of absolute bollocks".*

It is worth noting however that some of the participants suggested that they had tactics to deal with this convergence of different audiences online. A number of participants noted that the intended audience for a given update could be controlled by the user on certain platforms to make sure that only certain contacts view certain updates. Brian noted for example that he could change the security settings on Facebook so that he could know who was viewing his content. He suggested that "*My Facebook identity, I can portray myself to select groups of people in a certain way, and limit the audience*", and later expanded upon this to note:

> *"So for me (.) I can have like different versions of myself on Facebook and nobody would know really. Like I can doctor the audience so I can express my views on some things without other people seeing it. Cos like I've got family and friends and bosses and colleagues, people from all different aspects of my life. I can make sure I know who's seeing what so I don't have to worry about expressing liberal views without worrying about less liberal people".*

Other participants noted a different range of tactics for dealing with the overlap of different aspects of their offline lives. For example, a number of the participants did not utilise the security features afforded by certain platforms but instead chose to maintain an active divide in who they allowed to follow their updates. Brandon, for example, acknowledged that disparate aspects of his life converge

online, but noted that he could keep these converging aspects of his social life separate on Facebook. He suggested that *"with Facebook I'm very careful to keep my work colleagues, or anybody that I interact with in a professional sense separate"*. Nina also noted a similar coping mechanisms, suggesting she kept her work friends separate and tried to maintain the divide. She noted of her colleagues that:

> *"I didn't have them as friends until I left, and then they were like oh I didn't know you liked that, I didn't know you did that, and all that sort of stuff, and now when I meet up with them I'd say I'm more me, so I'd say yeah it is different".*

Isabel similarly acknowledged that "I *don't have anyone from work on Facebook"*.

It appears therefore that online, not only are broad aspects of a user's social lives represented across a range of platforms, but, given the ubiquity of social media in social life, these aspects can increasingly overlap, affecting how users act and interact. The participants seemed aware that increasingly a broader array of their social lives were being represented and present online, and on Facebook in particular, noted that this affected how they thought about updating and interacting. As Marwick and boyd (2011) and others (Davis & Jurgenson, 2014; Utz, 2015) noted with the term 'context collapse', users are having to balance possible input from friends, family, celebrities, companies and others, and come up with ways of dealing with this increased presence. As we will discuss in the section on boundaried negotiations, for some this meant engaging with specific features to maintain a divide, and for others this meant altering the content and style of their updates. It appears that, much like Goffman (1959) noted that we do offline, users still juggle multiple social aspects and present themselves accordingly for a specific audience. However, the specifics scope of the audience available to perform to appears to be largely tied to the spaces in which the users are performing. This further highlights the need to consider design online, as it can evidently affect and shape the specific audiences that have access to the given performances.

Uses beyond content production.

The interviews highlighted clearly that there was a need to consider uses of social media beyond the production of content alone. Browsing appeared to be a particularly large use of social media for all participants and an important aspect of their social media experience. All participants noted their use of various platforms for browsing and reading as a fairly regular occurrence, and suggested that it formed a part of their average engagement with the platforms, if not their most common use of the platforms.

Browsing for the participants was their regular engagement across a range of platforms. Molly's engagement with Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram for example was a frequent, almost daily, occurrence. However, for Molly the platforms were mainly used for 'browsing' the updates and content posted by close friends. She noted:

> *"I don't think I've ever posted a video. I don't really post on Facebook at all, I occasionally put, I don't really post on Twitter, I like retweet things, like the dance groups I'm in and things, like, if they're important, and I post some photos on Instagram like if I've been on holiday or whatnot. But not that often".*

Oliver similarly discussed how he went on Facebook *"(.) once a day I have a good browse (.) you know, I check my notifications"* and that on Reddit he participated by "*upvote, downvote, do all that, I don't really post, because by the time I've come up with something witty the whole thread is 10 hours old and I feel pointless*". Sally too mentions that "*I don't really write that many updates, status updates"* and notes of her use of Tumblr that "*I don't really put my own stuff up there I usually just reblog other people's things".* For Kirsty, posting was often the exception and was reserved for specific purposes,

where as her main engagement revolved around browsing. She suggested "*it tends to be kind of (.) If there's something to celebrate, I guess, I tend to stick it on Facebook. Umm. But beyond that I don't post a lot*". Similarly, Willow noted, despite going on Twitter regularly that *"my last tweet was 295 days ago (h)"*, and that, in regard to Facebook, browsing forms her normal engagement with the platforms:

> *"P: so I tend not to really write about stuff, I don't really (.) feel the need to broadcast loads of stuff on Facebook all the time.*
>
> *I: Sure.*
>
> *P: Erm, and I don't really like doing it (.) erm, so I tend not to – I'll, I'll like write normal like happy birthdays to people, or occasionally I'll put up status erm like big events or something or I've erm. Or commenting on other people's stuff that people have tagged me on or whatever, but I tend not to (.) really post".*

The participants highlighted that browsing was not always a mindless task for them, but that it filled a range of particular social functions, often serving to keep the participants informed about their friendship groups, specific news, and topics of interest. This was noted by most of the participants. Isabel noted that she browsed regularly, checking *"Facebook every day, several times a day"* to find out about her peers as "*It's useful to see it all and know what they're doing".* Similarly, Sally notes that for her, using social media consisted largely of *"just mindless scrolling. That's what I do with Facebook a lot, I don't really care, it's nice to see what people are doing sometimes".* Brandon too noted "i*t's mainly liking things and reading for me, keeping connected with what everyone else is doing".* Nina noted frequent browsing as a social function, suggesting of Facebook *"I use it to, look at what other people are doing, sounds a bit stalker-y, but what they're doing, what they're saying, and have a laugh at it and all that sort of stuff, and I'll post things up*". Similarly again, Kirsty suggested that:

"Facebook actually tends to be my substitute for gossip magazines in some way, you know sort

of catching up on what other people are doing. I realise that I'm quite a selfish Facebook user

because I very rarely actually post, I tend to just use it to read other people's goings on".

Molly also suggested browsing for her served a social purpose of keeping informed about her peers, a

point she particularly highlighted after moving to university. She noted:

"I still basically don't post on Facebook. Just see what everyone else is doing. Especially (.) people

I don't see so much now. Like school friends. It's really useful to know what everyone's up to,

even if I don't post much".

This suggests that there is a need to account for browsing when considering how users engage with

social media. This appears to be particularly apparent as browsing forms to main engagement with

these platforms for the participants, and serves a range of social roles and functions. Given the

importance and regularity of browsing future research should be reticent in over-prioritising content

production alone.

Beyond browsing updates, other uses of these platforms were also noted by the participants. Isabel for

example noted that she mainly did not use social media to post content, but instead chose to

communicate via private messaging if she wanted to communicate. She highlighted that "*I don't post*

stuff much. If I want to talk I'll normally use messenger". In a similar manner, Sally noted that Facebook's

integration of a private messaging system changed how she used the platform for social interaction and

allowed private group interactions:

"I do group convos with my friends. So I have one with two of my best friends, one with those

two girls and two others, one with all four of them and a couple of others. It's ridiculous, like we

couldn't just have one or two group convos, we have to have a hundred (h) But we'll organise

nights out or drinks and dinner or just have a general conversation and it's a way of keeping in

contact".

Further uses beyond content production were noted by the participants. Brandon for example noted that social media provided users with more than just the content of their friends, highlighting that there are several other types of content that can be engaged with. He suggested:

"Facebook tends to throw in an awful lot of things other than just what's originated by friends or

the people you're actually choosing to follow. I know that you can tell it not to, but (.) it's quite

interesting".

He noted that browsing social media could keep users informed about a number topics including news:

"I suppose it's useful for simply keeping tabs on what's going on in the world. Generally,

important news tends to be written about by other people. So a lot of news I tend to see through

people's reactions to it on social media".

Similarly, Brian highlighted the presence of news on social media, emphasising Twitter in particular, noting *"Cos Twitter's so instant and so quick. I just use it to see trends and also science news. More so in a way than I use like Google news, RSS feeds, I use Twitter instead".* In a similar manner, Kirsty noted "*if I'm reading Twitter then it tends to be that I'm finding out world news".* Sally too gained a wide range of information from Twitter:

"Twitter I usually just use it to keep on top of news in a way, and like, when new episodes of TV

shows come out, new books, umm, promos, stuff like that, and some current events as well".

It appears therefore that it is worth remembering that, just as an increasing range of websites are acquiring social capabilities and encouraging some form of interaction amongst users (Barnes, 2015; Canter, 2013), so too are social media platforms gaining additional capabilities beyond purely traditional peer-to-peer social content posting. A number of the participants noted this to be one of the main aspects of social media engagement for them. Willow for example suggested "*I use Twitter a bit like a news site anyway",* and Isabel noted of Twitter:

> *"I like it because you can add companies you're interested in or stuff like that, and see what they're doing, so as a newsfeed that's good. I like to know what's going on in the world and Twitter's that for me".*

Another use of social media beyond content production that was noted by the participants was social organisation. Brandon highlighted of Facebook:

> *"That if I want to organise an event that makes, Facebook makes it very easy to (.) just to set up some sort of reference point for people to get look back to find basic information about what's going on, and I find it very easy to communicate to lots of people at once".*

He later expanded upon this to suggest that:

> *"I suppose I use it almost as an extension of kind of like my office tools, like it's an extension of my email and my calendar, because I use it for sort of planning and for planning events and seeing what events are coming up, for remembering friends' birthdays, and getting in touch with people when I don't know how else to reach them. It's very useful".*

In a similar manner, inspired and influenced by her particular socio-cultural situation, Sally made use of social media as a study tool to aid her university studies:

"I'm part of quite a few groups, err, my specific course group and the general anthropology group…a couple of times we've organised events over a group message and a couple of times we've actually created an event page. I don't think it makes a difference".

After graduating and starting an office job, Sally later discusses how social media continued to provide a range of uses for her. Again this was sensitive to her given situation, with the platforms this time proving to be a useful work tool:

"I think that's the one good thing about Twitter in my opinion, that you can talk directly to entities like public transport and the police and you get that feeling of understanding what's going in real time. Like, I've been on the train and it's being held at the station for some reason and the guards won't say why, so I just search the station on Twitter and find out in seconds that it's cos there's trespassers on the tracks".

For the participants, social media served a number of uses and functions beyond just posting content. Posting content was, more often than not, not their main method of engagement with the platforms. We should therefore not assume equivalence across these activities. Instead we must be careful to contextualise social media use for each user and understand how it fills a particular purpose for them. As Molly suggests herself when asked about social media users having multiple identities across platforms she notes "*some people might act that way, but different people will use social media differently"*. Given this, it is again worth highlighting that the level of engagement with social media in terms of content production cannot be considered consistent across all users, and seems largely driven by the user's specific extratextual resources they bring to social media. Though again a larger sample size may be able to highlight some trends in terms of engagement through content production, this small sample size serves to problematize any single conclusive statement to instead highlight that the

engagement with social media emerges from the enmeshing of individual user, with all of their extratextual and intertextual resources, with specific platforms.

The interviews highlighted a point of consideration for research in regards to treatment of online data, specifically suggesting the need to consider the entirety of the social media experience beyond just data production (Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016; Kwak et al., 2010; Ngai et al., 2015). Though for some of the participants the public content they produced was not sizable, the social functions these platforms serve were nonetheless tangible and important. A such, seeking only participants who produce a wealth of content (Kozinets, 2010) may be problematic for understanding the reality of social media, and a range of uses should be considered alongside purely content production.

5.4. Comic Book Theory - enmeshing user and design

Different platform, different design features, different social performances of identity.

During the interviews a number of the participants discussed how the designs and the specific features present on a range of platforms affected the manner in which they acted and interacted. The interviews highlighted that a range of design choices could guide and affect actions and interactions online, but highlighted the need to also account for this is a non-deterministic fashion. It was apparent that the realisation and actualisation of social interaction and action online was unique to the enmeshing of a particular user with these design features, as different users would interpret and utilise these features differently. This meant that the participants' actions and interactions were bound to, and emerged from, the specific platforms and their specific designs and features, but that the interactions and actions that emerged from the engagement with these features were realised in unique and individual manner.

Brian in particular discussed a range of features that he noted affected his actions and interactions online. For example, Brian discusses the presence of hashtags on Twitter, noting that their specific functionality made communicating during and about big events online a lot easier, making him more likely to use Twitter to discuss these events:

> "So Twitter I use for big events, social events, and for (.) so for things like tomorrow, like big political events, is Twitter, and if you want to find (.) and because of the hashtag system, I know Facebook have tried to bring it in, but because of the hashtag system, to find people that care about it, or whatever, then definitely Twitter is the place to go".

This was not the only design feature of Twitter that Brian noted as augmenting his actions and interactions, he also later discussed the effects of the 140-character limit on Twitter as an aspect that affected how his actions and interactions were framed and realised. Tellingly, he noted:

> "I feel the character limit really forces your hand though. It makes you think really carefully about what you want to say, and how you want to say it. You have to nail it quickly as well. Like if something is happening right then you want to be the first to talk about it, so you have to be quick and you have to be funny, and you have to be short".

This show that, for Brian, the particular design choice of 140 characters, along with the consistently active temporal nature of the platform, meant that he framed and approached his actions and interactions in a particular manner, aware that he had to rely upon both brevity and speed to interact in what he perceived to be an effective manner. He later further noted that Twitter's specific design also made certain formats and uses harder than others, changing the type and form of the content he chose to post on Twitter:

"if I'm going to share an image there's not an image that I would put on Facebook that I

wouldn't on Twitter, and vice versa. But, if I want to share an image I put it on Facebook. Like

people won't look at your images on Twitter because they're normally either (.) if they're on their

phone it sometimes comes up, it sometimes doesn't, it's a bit funny, and also people won't follow

a link to a, a thing. So I'm sharing an image I will definitely share it on Facebook".

This was not unique to Brian. In a similar manner, Isabel also noted that she would not use Twitter for

photos highlighting that "*I don't really see the point in it on Twitter cos it's gone in a second".* For Brian

this further extended to the content posted on each site, with specific content and specific ideas shared

on certain platform due to the design features. For example, Brian noted that the ALS ice-bucket

challenge that involved sharing videos of someone throwing ice on their head was often not present on

Twitter "*because it's a visual. People don't watch videos on Twitter".*

Brian then was aware of a range of design restrictions that resulted in him preferring to engage with the

platform around trending topics and current events. His content was curtailed to be brief and

temporally relevant, and was often presented in a non-pictorial form. He later discussed what this

means for his identity on Twitter given that the updates he posted were shorter and that there was a

need to be curt and quick. When engaging in the film script analysis Brian suggested his identity would

be a "*more intelligent person. More scientifically active and probably more important. Because I present*

myself as like a researcher on Twitter, whereas I'm just me on Facebook". The identity that Brian

presented then was guided by design but importantly realised in an individual manner, as he chose how

to act and interact in an environment that he felt restricted his content in form and style, and that

encouraged discussion of events as they happened.

The notion of user-specific uses of these features can aptly be noted when considering Brandon's interactions on Twitter. Brandon, also noted that the design of Twitter constrained and shaped his interactions and actions, but for Brandon, this manifested itself not in concerns over being curt, current, and witty, but in concerns over the manner in which his updates would be construed by the reader. He noted that he felt he could only discuss certain topics on Twitter because:

> *"character limitation does an awful lot to restrict what I would otherwise would have posted about, like the topics I would otherwise post about, because I can't put context into it".*

Interestingly, Brandon also expands this concern over the intention and interpretation of his content to other platforms and their specific design affordances and features. He noted he used Instagram as:

> *"a kind of stream of consciousness, just from an image point of view, so I don't ever justify anything on there, I will just put a photo up because I think the photo itself looks cool or, sort of because I think that people will draw their own conclusions. I don't feel like I need to explain that".*

This highlights the need then for a model that allows for both a consideration of the user's extratextuality and a consideration of the restrictions of design. Brandon's particular extratextual resources affects how he utilises the specific features of different platforms, but that importantly, these platforms still constrain and confine what is possible. The interactions and actions then emerge from the enmeshing of individual user and individual platform.

Of course this enmeshing of user and design was not restricted to Twitter alone, and emerged as a point of discussion across a range of platforms. Brandon suggested in his interviews for example that he felt Facebook was slightly more 'interactive' than other platforms. When we discussed why he felt this might

be the case it became apparent that certain design features made it appear as if there was an ongoing

conversation happening around the content on Facebook in particular. Brandon noted:

> *"I sort of see lots of posts that friends have liked, or shared, or commented on, because lots of*
>
> *other people as well as them have done it, so I don't know if it's the way that it works, but the*
>
> *very popular very very popular posts seems to make their way into everybody's newsfeed at*
>
> *some point, so I've seen a lot of things that are not originated by friends of mine just purely*
>
> *because a few of my friends have commented on it or interacted with it, so therefore it's kind of*
>
> *keeps coming back up to my attention, and more often or not it will be something that I will have*
>
> *a reaction to again and again (.) It keeps the conversation going by putting it at the top of my*
>
> *feed every time".*

Facebook's choice to show users' the content that is being commented upon created for Brandon a

more interactive feel, and encouraged ongoing interaction around a given piece of content. Brandon

expanded upon how this was unique and different to the manner in which he perceived the other

platforms he used, noting:

> *"I think Facebook is at little more interactive, I think for me at least Instagram seems to be very*
>
> *much a sort of browsing, sort of just simply seeing what other people want to share with the*
>
> *world, rather than reacting to it, to them, and for me Twitter probably similarly actually, just*
>
> *simply it sort of feels like a lot of kind of little snapshot updates about what somebody is doing,*
>
> *sort of at that moment".*

Again, this was unique to Brandon and his particular extratextual resources, but nonetheless these

aspects of design were equally present for all users using the platform. This was noted, for example, by

Nina, who suggested that the continual re-emergence of content and the general slower pace of

Facebook led to her sharing different content and performing identity in a unique manner on different platforms. She noted:

> "The other day I was like oh I have a headache grr, whereas I wouldn't put that on Facebook, cos I wouldn't put a little update like that, because it just gets lost in the time stream on Twitter which is fine, whereas on Facebook, I don't know. People will be like oh are you okay, and that sort of thing".

For other participants, different aspects of platform design were highlighted as fostering specific manners of acting and interacting, unique to their given needs and situation. Isabel noted one aspect in particular that she felt changed the way that she was able to discuss subjects on Facebook, highlighting that the groups feature allowed dedicated places for like-minded users to discuss specific topics. In her particular case, influenced by her particular extratextual resources, this manifested itself in discussions around politics. She suggested:

> "it's hard to explain really, but the way that umm Facebook is set is kind of segregated into different stuff, isn't it, so you can literally go to groups and stuff like that, whereas Twitter's very much a stream of chat. Like individual profiles and then what they do, but all shouting at once in a never ending mess"

For Isabel the partitioning off of particular areas to discuss dedicated topics led to different social styles emerging on Facebook than on Twitter. She highlighted that this partitioning fostered a slower feel with dedicated group areas which she suggested meant that people could interact around content more easily. She noted: *"I think Facebook is, it's got groups and sections and stuff so you can post images and videos and they'll stay there longer for people to talk about"*.

Other participants noted there were a range of other features that would affect how interactive they perceived the platforms to be. Whilst this was guided by design, it was realised in a unique manner by each participant to their specific needs. Oliver for example discussed the fact that Reddit allowed community moderators. By allowing for community self-moderation Oliver noted that often the level of interaction was variable depending on the quality of moderation, and as such his participation in the sub-Reddit was therefore also variable:

> *"when you get a good moderated subReddit, like r/games, sticks to the point, keeps going with it, the mods are fantastic, who keep it on track. And then you get others that are just a chaos and you can't be bothered with it".*

For Brian however, interactivity was bound up in the notion of current topics. In his comparison of the design of Facebook and Twitter he noted Twitter's specific design as fostering a greater sense of continual interactivity.

> *"Twitter has so many trends, so many fads that are so quick passing. And I think Twitter's an important (.) I think people would mind, but I don't think the world would mourn the loss of Facebook, whereas I think people would mourn the loss of Twitter, because of things like the live-tweeting of things, that you wouldn't get on Facebook in the same way, because the audience is live and commenting right then and there".*

However, Willow noted that she felt she was more likely to interact around shared content on Facebook, not Twitter. In comparison to Brian, who suggested the ability to comment upon events as they were happen inspired ongoing interaction on Twitter, Willow noted her engagement with shared content was affected by being able to view a preview of that content on Facebook:

> *"If someone shares a link on Twitter and the tweet's not something I'm particularly interested in*
>
> *I won't click on it (.) if someone shares a share on Facebook I'll still have a general idea of what*
>
> *the thing they were sharing was, because there'll be a little picture and a little bit of blurb and*
>
> *sometimes if I'm really bored I'll just click on it to see what the hell it's about, because it's not*
>
> *just a web link, it's not just, it's got a tag line and a photo and a bit of text underneath, it's not*
>
> *just a web link, a site address, so. I'm more likely to click on it".*

Sally on the other hand noted aspects of Facebook's design that she felt hindered the interactivity of the platform:

> *"Facebook (.) it's kind of hard to keep track of what's going on Facebook, I found.*
>
> *I: How come?*
>
> *P: Just because their trending system is really bad. It's kind of like, you get three little items at*
>
> *the top right hand corner of your page and if you don't look at it you don't see it, whereas*
>
> *Twitter it's quite easy to kind of see what people are talking about? Especially because quite a*
>
> *lot of the trending tags there'll always be someone on the newsfeed talking about it, or*
>
> *commenting on it, or something like that".*

Given this, it appears that the engagement with platforms and the perception of their interactive merits appears to be largely individual and aligned to the specific needs of the user, but nonetheless intimately bound up in the design affordances of a given platform. As Comic Book Theory suggests, it is through the enmeshing of user and design that a given use of the platform emerges. This is succinctly noted by Isabel who highlighted that engagement with the platforms varies from individual to individual. She noted that *"Facebook you've got a whole variety of people and the way that they behave on there. Like I've got friends who only share videos, and some people just text, yeah".*

This concept of the enmeshing of user and design can further be highlighted if we re-consider the idea of uses of social media beyond content production. Despite these platforms often being set up explicitly to encourage users to want to produce content, a fact noted by a number of researchers across a range of platforms (Fogg & Iizawa, 2008; Keenan & Shiri, 2009; Mazer et al., 2007), Molly choose not to fulfil this potential and to engage with them in her own manner for her own social purposes. She noted that she felt no real pressure to create content online, saying "w*ith my friends I don't feel really pressure (.) and I think my friends (.) they know that I'm not (.) posting things about myself online now*". Instead Molly used the platforms in her own manner and for her own purposes. In essence, Molly decided how to complete the closure and how to engage with the features of these platforms which she used almost exclusively to browse content rather than to produce content.

Molly did however report elements of design that aided her particular usage of platforms and encourage her to produce content specific. In particular, Molly noted that her content production increased once she was afforded the ability to privatise her usage and to control who saw what information about her. Some platform provided her the ability to be more private than others. For example, in an interview conducted after she started attending university, Molly noted she had started using Snapchat as a messenger system with her sister as it allowed a format that she felt was very controlled and through which she felt any images sent were not permanent. She noted:

> *"Everybody uses it and it's easy to get on. So I thought I'd try it, and I like it. It's (.) my step-sister is at uni in (northern UK town). She doesn't like texting really. So it's my message (.) way of messaging her now, to catch up and check in with each other and have quick chats. I don't mind sending her a picture of me. She won't like judge me, and its fun with all the stuff it's got. We're family so it feels (.) it's nice"*.

Molly later also notes that "*It's also less (.) has less (.) it's not permanent so I feel like I can maybe use it more without worrying*". When given the option to be private, her usage also increased on Instagram:

> "*I guess I post more on Instagram now though. Because I know less people can see it, in terms of who I let see it and follow me. I (.) I rarely post picture of like me alone. More of what I'm doing and who I with but that (.) that's like (.) I don't like taking pictures of myself really. But I'm using it more. I'm just, not that sort of person who really wants to, to comment at all like 'oh you're so pretty' because often that (.) they just say things and don't really mean that, you know? So I don't see the point of all that. But I've started putting up some stuff, especially as I can control who sees it now. It's fine.*
>
> *I: Is there like (1.) Is there anyone in particular you really don't want to see your stuff or is it the public?*
>
> *P: umm, like no one particularly I don't want, you know. It's more just (.) knowing who's seeing it and not having to worry about it*"

Here we see that the affordance of privacy as a design feature encouraged interactivity, but only when combined with Molly's specific extratextual needs and situation that produced the given unique identity performance, bound in both the design and the user. When Molly felt she could control the image constructed by other people in regards to her identity, she felt more ready the share content, though still with a degree of care over the content. As such, it appears her specific usage was bound to particular design features, but realised in a unique manner due to her given extratextual resources.

The use of third-party apps to augment design, and the effects of this upon social interaction.

As mentioned previously, a platform's presentation can vary from one device to the next. However, it can also be augmented with particular third-party apps that can change aspects of the platform's design in an array of manners, affecting how users utilise these platforms.

This was discussed by a number of the participants. For example, Brian, noted that the control over aspects of design afforded by third-party apps might increase his usage of Twitter. He suggested "*if I find a really nice app that does Twitter, like tweetdeck used to do but now they started charging, then I would use Twitter more"*. Similarly, Kirsty discussed the use of third-party apps that help her engage with social media in a manner specific to her extratextual situation:

> "*I use Hootsuite at work, in my professional sort of capacity, and again it's good to a point but even the pro version does have bugs. The analytics on it are crap, mind you, and of course as a marketer it's quite annoying not being able to analyse the reach you've had"*.

She also highlighted another application, named 'If-this-then-this' (IFTT) that augments the design of the platforms and helped her present identity in specific manners, again informed by her specific extratextual situation. She described it as a:

> "*Brilliant app, absolutely love it. More useful professionally, than personally to be honest, but I really love. So mine's automatically linked up to, if I ever remember to do something on Instagram, then it posts it to Twitter as a native picture"*.

Willow also noted the use of these augmenting applications, highlighting "*on my phone see I use a custom app which looks very different from the Twitter app"*. She detailed the differences and how they helped her change the design of the platform to suit her specific needs:

"I don't use the Twitter client on my phone, I use erm a different app and it'll save where I leave off so I scroll up to most current, whereas on Twitter on desktop, and this is me not having used it in a while, you normally start at the latest stuff and have to scroll down and I prefer scrolling up rather than scrolling down – dunno why, but it just I prefer – I think because otherwise I'm coming in on conversations and discussions that have like started before and I'm seeing the end of, so I prefer to scroll upwards <u>through</u> the conversations and follow the thread of things that are happening, rather than scrolling down and going what on earth is going on and then waiting to get the fiftieth tweet before I [understand what's happening".

Sally also pointed out different way of augmenting platform design, noting that on Tumblr she was able to add extensions which changed the design of the platform and altered how she used it. She highlighted one example in particular that allowed her to use the platform in a more streamlined fashion:

"I have an extension on there that makes it so much more user-friendly. It just makes using it easier. So, without the extension, to reblog a post you have to click on the reblog button, which brings up a pop-up on the page where you can add like a comment or tags, and then you have to click the reblog button again. And depending on the size of the post, it can take a couple of minutes for it to load up and then for it to post to your actual blog. With the extension you just hover over the reblog button and a little pop up comes up. You can add a comment but the most important thing for me is that you can save a set of tags. So once the pop up comes up you can just click on the saved tag and then hit reblog and it's done. I love it".

Here then we can see a range of specific augmentations of platform features to alter the manner of engaging with the platforms specific to the given user's needs. Given the rise of third-party apps, it

appears that it is worth considering that there are tactics and resources the user can employ to actively alter aspects of the design of the platform to suit their given needs and situations. It is also worth remembering, when looking at and analysing online content, that not every user will be using the 'vanilla' version of the platform, and that the specific manifestation of the platform they are using may affect how they choose to share content, and generally act and interact.

Extratextual and intertextual influences.

Comic Book Theory suggests that online identity presentation emerges from the enmeshing of an individual user with a platform design. The resulting identity performances is informed by the design of the platform, which guides and shapes how the user is able to present social identity. However, the identity performance is equally realised in a unique manner as each user commits closure to complete their specific narrative, guided by their specific extratextual and intertextual resources, which they bring to bear upon the juxtaposed design elements. During the interviews a number of extratextual factors were discussed with the participants which affected how they chose to commit closure and engage with specific platforms.

Brian highlighted that he was aware that specific users would engage with the platform in a variety of manners. When asked about the consistency of identity presentation across social media platforms he noted:

> *"for people, every day people like judges, teachers, anybody, has to draw that line between*
>
> *people they have in the office and people that are their friend. You can't have (.) umm*
>
> *professional (.) like there has to be a cut off, you can't share everything with your employers or*

your employees, and you certainly can't share it with people that work for you or that you're

involved with work, like social workers, or teachers, or anything".

Brian later revealed how his own specific extratextual situation, specifically his homosexuality, could

lead to unique and specific engagements with social media features:

"I know particularly in the LGBT community, that is a genuine problem for a lot of people who

aren't out or aren't comfortable (.) portraying themselves in a certain way around certain

members. You almost have to have a split identity. And even with work life balance, but even just

in your personal life. And a lot of people don't feel comfortable in being themselves".

Kirsty similarly revealed during the interviews that her approach towards social media was largely

influenced by her specific situation and the extratextual knowledge she bought to the platforms. As she

worked in online communication she noted that her identity was *"semi-formed by sort of professional*

concerns as well" and noted that her job largely effected how she understood and engage with social

media. She provides a particular example of this:

"Yeah, and actually again from a sort of professional that works with social media on a daily

basis, my boss regularly has said that he expects me to use my personal social media to promote

the charity and the work that we do, and he has a real problem with me having separate work

and personal Twitter feeds, for instance, or Facebook feeds. I put my foot down on it because I

wasn't comfortable, but there is a question I think about authenticity and umm also, yeah, I

dunno I guess you can't insist on it because of employment law and the rest of it, but umm,

that's a dilemma that I face fairly regularly".

Kirsty later noted that she had adopted a single Twitter account, which changed how she approached interacting on Twitter. She noted "m*y Twitter feed is shared, I tend to use it slightly more professionally than personally umm, so I only have one Twitter",* specifically noting that *"I tend to use it a bit more to signpost stuff that sort of shows I'm interested in the right things for my work".* She later details an example of this, noting "*I do a lot of live-tweeting on it at the moment*" for big events at work. Kirsty also noted other effects of her particular extratextual situation, in particular discussing her attitude towards profile images:

> *"Facebook tends to change a lot more, but at the moment (.) I think again because the other two are professional facing, or professional focused, I don't like to have my partner in my pictures on them, because actually I think there's a huge thing about being seen to a woman with a partner and suddenly you lose a lot of professional influence. So whereas my Facebook photo quite often has me and my partner in them, I would never do that for Twitter and LinkedIn".*

It is evident then that Kirsty's specific interactions and identity presentations online were informed by her specific extratextual resources, which change how she engaged with the design features available on the platforms.

Another pertinent discussion of a specific extratextual background affecting the participant's approach and attitude towards social media was found with Willow. She detailed her specific issues noting:

> *"I've got some mental illness, so I think I probably pay a huge amount of attention (.) because I pay a huge amount of attention to how I present myself in real life all the time ever (.) and I know I'm not necessarily the typical experience, because I've seen an awful lot of people with various mental illness have said that actually interacting online is a lot easier, whereas for me it carries exactly the same level of stress, apart from the fact that I can't see how a person is*

reacting. So it actually carries an added level of stress for me. I can't see how they react, I can

see how they choose to react to it, but I can't see how they immediately react. So I don't like that

as much. So I don't tend to put much up, basically, it's why I tend to sort of stay away".

Willow specific extratextual situation affected how she interacted on the platform and engaged with the

design features. She noted that she would "*struggle with the idea that I have anything worth saying*"

and expanded this, noting:

"so I tend to stay away from, like, Facebook and Twitter, both feel like they need to be (.) I know

a lot of people don't feel the same way, but they feel more important. It feels like there's more

weight".

Some participants highlighted that shifts in their offline lives could lead to changes in how the engaged

with online design features to present identity. Brandon for example noted:

"I've definitely noticed that in some workplaces that I've had it's been very much keep people

separate from work…However, in my current office there's maybe 12 or 13 people who wouldn't

often socialise outside work, but that all have each other as contacts on Facebook and very

regularly make open comments about what somebody has posted up about last night".

Nina also discussed how changes in her offline situation led to changes in how she performed identity

and how she approached the platforms as social spaces, noting of previous work colleagues:

"They're on my Twitter because they followed from the day of my interview, like [the company]

themselves, and then I had to be really careful with what I said for the year and a bit I worked

there, I wouldn't say anything controversial, in fact I stopped using I stopped really using it as

much because they were following me and I knew if I blocked them it was really suspicious

because um they even asked me to stalk other people that had blocked them, even though I've

left the company, which I have done on one occasion because she was slagging off a customer".

Sally also detailed how her changes in her life affected how she approached and used social media. As a university student, Sally noted that social media provided a way to study efficiently. She highlighted Facebook, suggesting:

"it's kind of also an easy way to share documents from lectures from my uni mates, and you

know, ask general questions for groups, like the anthropology group or my course group. So it's

just an easier way to keep in contact with them because I don't have all their numbers".

However, Sally noted that her engagement with the platforms changed after leaving university and beginning to work at an office:

"One of the guys I work with, we don't have each other's phone numbers, but we message a fair

bit outside of work (h) and at work too (h) over Facebook messenger. It's useful like that because

sometimes he gives me a lift home or if one of us is on holiday and we need to get in contact we

can, or if I'm ill I can message him and ask him to tell my boss I'm not in. I think (.) it's interesting

that we've been working together for almost a year now and we only talk over Facebook

Messenger, like we don't use our phones as phones with text messages or calls".

Sally noted changes in both her content and her attitudes towards social media. She highlights that:

"Tumblr I used to go on every day, I'd check it as soon as I got in and just kept scrolling down

until I caught up with the previous night. But I just don't have the time anymore now I'm at work,

it's a lot to keep it going so if I have a spare fifteen or twenty minutes I'll load it up and scroll

until I give up and then I'll move onto something else. I used to religiously refresh Tumblr every

ten minutes because I followed so many people there would be loads of new posts, but yeah,

now I just check it once a week or once every two weeks".

As such, it appears that identity presentation is an ongoing and malleable issue that adapts with the user, relevant to their given situation and concerns at any given time.

Another case of changes in offline situation affecting engagement with social media was noted with Molly. Before going to university, Molly noted that her main contact on Twitter was with "p*eople who I know already, who I've like met face to face*", and that:

> "*To be honest, because, like, I mainly use it for friends and people I already know there's not really any need to put anything up there. Like who am I putting it up for? I'll tell the people who I tell in person, it doesn't have to be there forever, because it's not really important enough to be anywhere forever. It's just (.) stuff*"

However, upon moving to university Molly began to follow different kinds of user beyond just known offline friends:

> "*P: I use Twitter a lot more now. A lot (.) A lot more as a like a professional place. I pretty much only follow researchers and like government groups. Or people to do with education, primary education.*
>
> *I: That's cool*
>
> *P: Yeah, it helps. Like, I feel it's really helpful. I get the most up to date stuff, lots of knowledge about everything. It's really great. I think I follow like 5 other people who aren't professional. People I know already. I keep it separate I guess, cos they're all on Facebook*".

Molly also noted that the change in context affected her concerns about social media, and therefore, her engagement with the platforms and their specific features. She noted that she felt she had to be wary about who was viewing her content, noting:

> *"we had a lecture. They said other students had been kicked of their placements and NQT stuff for not being (.) professional on Facebook and stuff. So I feel like I have to be careful online about it all".*

It is important to highlight however that though the context through which Molly engaged with Twitter as a social platform did shift to accommodate her growing professional concerns, her usage largely remained the same. She noted, "*I still haven't tweeted anything. Not myself. I retweet and follow, it's a way of reading and being professional for me. It's like my professional space, that side of me*".

This shift in context for Molly did bring about a change in the manner through which she approached Twitter as a platform. However, given that her usage did not largely alter from one context to the next, it appears that there again is a need to highlight the need for a consideration of more than just produced tangible content. Though she was still not producing content on the platform, Twitter served largely different purposes for Molly before and after joining university. Therefore, Molly's extratextual situation changed her engagement with, and contextualisation of, social media, but did not significantly alter her content output.

The notion of extratextuality presented in this section further highlights the need to re-consider the notion of an online/offline divide and the need to contextualise social media usage (Jurgenson, 2012; Pond, 2016). The participants' specific offline contexts clearly produced unique engagement with social

media. Though, depending on the user, this did not always change the content created, it was evident that this did change their engagement with the platforms in line with their given concerns and interests.

Identity boundary negotiation between user and design.

In line with Barad's (2003, 2007) work in Agential Realism, this research was keen to unpack how the boundaries of identity performance were negotiated between user and design. The interviews suggested that, as suggested in Comic Book, the participants' identity performances were negotiated in a user-specific and platform-specific manner, as individual users enmeshed with the specific design features to negotiate what was included in a materially heterogeneous identity performances and what was excluded. For the participants, much of this manifested itself in concerns over the audiences online and who was able to view content and profiles.

Because of Twitter's open and public design, Brian felt that he had to actively alter how he presented his identity, controlling and tapering the content of his messages. He noted: "*Facebook is there for me to, to socialise with my friends, I suppose, to put my opinions. I wouldn't dare put my opinions on Twitter, because you can't restrict it".* Interestingly, the idea that "*you can't restrict"* audience on Twitter is not entirely true as users are able to set their profile to private and choose who views their content. When I question him on this he replied:

> "oh sure, yeah, you can (.) but it's a catch-22 sort of thing. If you want to get everything out of Twitter you have to accept that it's going to have to be public. You just have to restrict what you say. You play the game and change what you say".

Brian later expanded on this to note when asked about audience control on Twitter:

"It's not something you can do on Twitter if you want to go online. You kinda want attention, you

just don't get to decide what attention, so you have to be more (.) careful with what you say. You

have to hold yourself back and think 'what would someone think about this?'".

This is rather telling in regards to the notion of a boundaried identity. Despite being offered the option

through design to protect his content, Brian seemed to think this was simply not an option if he wanted

to use Twitter. He felt therefore that he had no control of the public nature of the platform, and that

this was bound in the design of the platform. Instead, for Brian, the boundaries had to be negotiated by

altering his content rather than by negotiating with design. Brian later expanded upon this notion, and

discussed that platform-specificity of this boundaried negotiation, noting:

"But I think in a way Facebook does have more permanence, but you can doctor that

permanence to people you trust easier, whereas Twitter you either get all public or all private,

there's no in-between".

In this manner, it is clear that Brian's negotiation of the boundaries of his materially heterogeneous

identity was bound to a negotiation and trade-off between himself and the specific platform he was

using.

Brian was not the only participant to grapple with the need to be public on Twitter. Brandon also felt

that the control of privacy was non-negotiable on Twitter and therefore he felt he had to accept that

this aspect was out of his control, and instead alter his content:

"Twitter I feel I have no real control at all, because I know fully that everything I put on there is

available to everyone, umm, which probably limits my use of it a bit"

He later noted that this negotiation of the boundaries of his materially heterogeneous identity was not only platform specific, but also affected his subsequent performances on each platform:

> "I share more specific info, like what I'm doing and where I am on Facebook as well, because its, to me, it's safe and I trust the people I let follow me. On Twitter or Instagram, because I don't know who's going to see it, all the stuff I share is vague and kinda loose".

In a similar sense, and again driven by the specific controls afforded to her by each platform, Nina noted that she too felt she had to accept trade-offs in her performance and alter her actions:

> "the other day I posted a post up, I can't remember what it was, and I wrote the word, definitely, and I spelt definitely wrong, and I got all these tweets back about how I spelt, and they were like you definitely should learn how to spell definitely, and so I deleted the tweet in the end, and now I've decided never to type the word definitely, because I can't spell really well. So yeah, I think I do change as per the audience, cos with Twitter anyone can read it…whereas on Facebook it's my friends, so if there's a spelling mistake they'd let it slip, so I'm not really, I'm just sort of more, relaxed with what I say on Facebook".

For these participants, their usage of Twitter as a platform was largely informed by the audience, but also importantly was tied to the public design of the platform and their lack of willingness to engage with the design affordances to police this publicness. As such, they felt the only option they had to control the identity performance was through the content they placed on the platform. If we consider the boundaries of the performance, this in essence means that, the boundaries of what was included in the materially heterogeneous identity performances were felt to be non-negotiable in terms of privacy, so despite being afforded the ability to enact some control, a trade-off in content was made to be able to participate fully on the platform.

However, on some platforms the participants felt that the scope of the audience could be controlled through the design affordances of the platform, allowing the participants freer reign over the content and subject matter of their posts. For example, Kirsty noted that design features in Facebook could be utilised to the user's benefit in order to patrol who could access and read their posts:

> "I've started to use the privacy filters on things a lot more than I ever used to. Now that I sort of have to think about it, I've got a lot more careful about making sure that everything's friend locked and that sort of people that are in the same groups as me can't necessarily see what I'm putting out".

Here then we see Kirsty using the design of Facebook to make sure that her content was only available to the intended audience, meaning that the trade-off in topic was not necessary and design was instead utilised to set boundaries. Similarly, Brian noted he felt that he could utilise the design to his advantage of Facebook, rather than accept it the openness of the design as he had done on Twitter, in order to change the audience of his content:

> "If I want to I'll restrict the post to people that I know won't go crazy if I share a liberal opinion or a sex positive thing, or whatever, a non-gender binary thing or whatever, like, to people that I know would be offended, and I can doctor them out of it".

He noted that this level of control was nuanced on Facebook, and that he was able to negotiate control over many aspects of his performance:

> "I can even control the comments on Facebook if I want. And once it's out there, I can change how public or private it gets without really worrying. It doesn't feel as (.) risky as Twitter does"

Brian later articulated the importance of the affordance of control through design, and what this meant for the manner in which he could present identity, noting:

"I feel like I can control my Facebook because I can limit the views, I can limit the audience, my online identity with google is terrifying. I genuinely don't know who sees what circle is, I can't, no. I just don't understand it. And I feel like I have no control over my google identity. My Facebook identity, I can portray myself to select groups of people in a certain why, and limit the audience, and with Twitter, umm, I control myself very well on that".

Similar sentiments were noted by Brandon, who suggested that "*I think Facebook is just safer. I know who's seeing it so I can let my hair down. I can say whatever I like really. It's not as much of an issue*". He expanded to note that the control over the boundaries afforded by Facebook's privacy features meant that he could interact in a less restricted manner:

"in terms of the information I put out there, it doesn't, even though it does require a certain amount of information in order to have an account, I don't feel I have to lie because I can hide it easily enough with the privacy settings, and I feel that I can control the audience that my posts go to, even on a case by case, so if there's something I want to publish to a wider group I know how to do that and I know how to restrict access to others".

Brandon later again further notes that he felt he needed to be:

"a lot more careful with the content I put out on Twitter because I know it's a lot less easily policed, so I would probably be a lot less inflammatory or a lot less controversial with anything I put on Twitter, whereas with Facebook I know that the audience I have I know at least vaguely people that can see that, so I suppose I'm slightly less concerned about whether I'm going to offend people".

Brandon telling noted that his reliance upon design features of Facebook to maintain the boundaries of the identity performance could occasionally lull him into a false sense of security, leading to him to take less care over his content. He notes *"I possibly put up quite a lot about my life, knowing that the privacy settings I've given, sort of shield a lot of people from seeing it, so I possibly take less care now than I used to".*

This suggests then that the boundaries of identity performance occur on a platform-by-platform basis for the users, who reach their own conclusions about how they choose to present themselves within the confines of the specific platform and its affordances. On some platforms, this seems to manifest itself in active and conscious monitoring of the user's activity, and on others, it manifests in a reliance upon the design features. In each case, it is clear that it is not possible to separate the resultant identity performance from either the user or the platform design; the performances emerge from the enmeshing of these elements to produce specific performances with their own negotiated boundaries. Again of course, this is specific to the individual user. For example, contrary to the previous examples provided above, Isabel noted that she was largely concerned with policing her interaction on Facebook because of the specific audience present there, rather than the more generalised audience on Twitter. She noted that she had to temper her responses on Facebook at times, noting: "*I try not to reply. I usually write it and then just delete it"* and later adding, "*If I was gonna write something and I know that I had friends that would be completely offended by it, I wouldn't put it up".* Similar content regulation on Facebook was noted by Willow, who unlike other participants did not utilise the affordances of Facebook to control the specific audiences of her post, meaning she felt she had to temper the content of her messages. She noted: *"I know you can set different settings so that only some people see your Facebook stuff and other people don't, but that's just too much hassle and I can't be arsed".* Instead Willow chose to doctor and curtail her performance on Facebook, so much so that she noted "*my stuff*

on Twitter is actually more personal" than the doctored content she placed on Facebook. She suggests this was because she felt she could curate the audience on Twitter effectively with the design features there. She noted *"you've gotta add people on Facebook that you know, because otherwise it's insulting apparently"*, *w*hereas in regards to Twitter she noted:

> *"I have curated who I have on Twitter, so they tend to be people who have fairly similar viewpoints to me, um, politically, so I tend not to sort of have to put up with the same level of crap".*

This therefore highlights the need to consider the enmeshing of individual user with individual platform design. The negotiation and trade-offs between user and design are enacted in an individual manner, informed by the specific user and their needs, and bound to the specific design of the platform.

An interesting version of different identity work and boundary negotiation with the design of platforms was noted by Nina. She discussed how the design of Twitter lead to her taking more care in the presentation of particular aspects of her identity than she did with similar features on Facebook. She compares the 'about me' sections provided for the user to describe themselves, present in different manifestations on both Twitter and Facebook. She noted of Twitter that the maintenance of this aspect of her online identity was often crucial and of importance:

> *"Twitter is really important, cos, like, say for example I want to find someone and I'm not quite sure if it's them, I'll look at that, cos their timeline could be full of rubbish, like hashtag loser or, just complete random statements. Whereas that top statement says is from so and so or works in M&S or and I'll be like oh I know who that is now, it is the person I mean to follow, so I'll follow them".*

This lead to Nina putting a lot of care into how she maintained this aspect of her identity presentation on Twitter:

> *"Twitter is always important. I always try and think of something to put in my Twitter bio cos I don't like mine, and I can never think (.) and I actually probably change it once a month? Even just slightly. Just by putting like a comma or a full stop. You do change it. It's the first thing you can see on people's pages, especially with the new layout with the picture at the top and you swipe it across"*

However, on Facebook, this aspect of identity presentation was not as central for Nina to the overall identity presentation, and therefore the maintenance of this feature was not as crucial for her, despite being offered the same ability to present identity.

> *"Whereas Facebook you've got all the pictures, and the layout of it, like the pictures, the videos and stuff, you can just watch really quickly and you can be like yeah that's the right person. But one on Facebook I haven't changed since I first went out with my boyfriend 4 years ago".*

Sally also noted that she did not maintain this aspect of Facebook. When asked why she suggested:

> *"Because I know no one reads it! Because, um, like, when I, when my uni friends added me, I literally just told them what name I was under, because I'm not under my full name, and umm, once I was friends with one of them, it was really easy for the rest of them to find me because they just went through their page, and it came on their pages, their homepages, that I was friends with them, so it was really easy for them to add me. But, yeah, I know that I'm the only one that looks at this and updates it and it's just somewhere that I can keep all my favourite quotes".*

It appears therefore that the engagement with features is largely platform-specific and cannot be separated or isolated from the specific platform, as it may not be used consistently. Despite both platforms offering the ability to 'write' identity in textual format, Nina feels this was not as important on Facebook, given that the design allowed identity to be confirmed in a clearer, less ambiguous manner. What is important in regards to identity performance therefore appears to be inconsistent across platforms.

Interestingly, Nina acknowledges that this is not a fixed dynamic, but that this had been an aspect of identity presentation that was central to her performances previously. Nina noted "*I did change it a lot when I was in school". A*s such, not only can engagement with specific feature be inconsistent across platforms, the interviews suggest that boundary negotiation between user and design on any give platform is itself largely malleable with the extratextual resources of the user shifting. An example of the need to account for the specific user can be seen in the case of Willow, who noted she did not maintain her Twitter 'about me' section with as much regularity as some of the other participants:

> *"It's not something I think about so much on Twitter, because I tend to use it like it's almost a news site, so I don't really think about my end of it or what I'm presenting a lot. I sort of set it up and then I've just kind of left it alone, whereas on Facebook I'm quite careful about how I choose to present myself and describe myself".*

In terms of the negotiation of the boundaries of identity performance between user and design, Willow telling discusses that she feels she was 'forced' into presenting herself in certain ways due to the design of both Facebook and Twitter:

"P: actually feel like they force me to fill stuff out whereas I'd rather not.

I: Both of them?

P: Both of them, yeah. Like I said, my Twitter bio was empty for ages and I eventually felt like I had to put something there, even though I don't really feel like I wanted to put something there. Um. And Facebook it does feel like you have to fill shit out, cos it otherwise it goes why haven't you filled out and you haven't done this and you haven't updated it like six months (.) the site just constantly pressures you to do it. Update your Facebook profile! Every time I go on Facebook it has that little tiny thing update your Facebook profile. Um. You've got 14 steps to go through! No matter how many times I skip through them it's like do them again!".

This suggests that, though she feels she is forced to present herself in a specific manner, she still maintained some control and agency over the boundaries of the resulting enmeshing of design and user as she chose not to engage with the features.

Further to this, Willow later provided some strong and interesting insights into the materially heterogeneous nature of identity on Facebook. She noted that she felt that the design of the platform did not allow her to express enough of her identity, and that the afforded design elements were too confining for her to be able to adequately express identity:

it doesn't feel like I have a huge amount of control over my identity. Mine is the same as everybody else's, although I can pick bits and pieces, how much attention do people actually pay to all that kind of stuff, if 90% of the time you're looking down your feed. So even if I've got a nice cover picture and nice profile picture, how big is that in people's screens? So what you actually recognise is just kind of, sometimes you don't pick the details out, you just recognise a

vague shape and colour. It's even (.) even if I control what's on my actual page how often do

people go there?

Willow did not feel therefore that her identity presentation was fully under her control, and that the identity performance afforded to her through platform design did not emphasis the features and aspects that she found to be important. For Willow, the ability to present self through an 'about me' section was largely unimportant:

"it's not really for anybody, it's for Facebook, so I don't really care enough to change it. And I

can't think of the last time I looked at anyone else's unless I was specifically curious to see

something about somebody. And that's not very often. I don't think in the last 3 years I've ever

bothered looking at it, and because you know most of the time people don't bother updating it".

The interviews suggest therefore that identity performance online emerges from the enmeshing of an individual user with individual design features, with the boundaries of the emergent materially heterogeneous identity performance maintained in an individual way by combinations of different users and platforms. In this manner, the boundaries of the performances are also noticeably negotiable and subject to change.

Chapter 6 – Discussion

6.1. Introduction

The axial coding of the data outlined in Chapter 5 revealed a number of salient issues around how young people are enmeshing with social media and technology to produce unique identity performances online. In particular, it is evident that social interaction online is complex and variable, and is the result of numerous issues and elements, human and non-human, enmeshing to produce the particular identity performance. This chapter will discuss the key thematics raised by this data, considering what it reveals about how we can understand and interpret youth performances of identity online.

6.2. Comic Book Theory - reconsidering online identity.

From the data gathered and the analysis it is clear that there is a need for a consideration of the many nuances that create specific identity performances online. This thesis presents Comic Book Theory in this regard as a framework that allows for the unpacking of the relationship between humans and design that create specific identity performances online.

The literature review established that young people's experiences online are diversifying increasingly, both in terms of the platforms they are using (Lenhart, 2015) and in their social experiences and engagements with these platforms (Hopke et al., 2016). Of course, the ability to socially interact is not without boundaries and limitations that restrict, shape, and effect how an individual engages in social interaction. For a long time in identity research, and in sociology as a whole, the restrictions that have been studied and considered are social restrictions. Discourses and audiences have been unpacked through multiple lenses as aspects that shape and restrict actions and interactions, both online and

offline. This research was keen to understand the interplay between other unaccounted for restrictions and limitations, specifically drawing attention to an aspect of identity performance that has been neglected in sociology; the effect of design. This focus appears to be especially necessary online given that the platforms present us with specific designs through which to act and interact, restricting the modes and methods through which we are able to present ourselves, be they the ways we can talk, the amount we can say, the topics we can discuss, the ways we can move through these spaces, the representations and image we can use, the colour pallet we are afforded, and a myriad other design choices. Online, every pixel of these social spaces is explicitly designed, and this design is highly curated. As such there is a desperate need in online research to consider how users are able to present themselves, and how they deal with and negotiation these limitations and restrictions on identity presentation across a diverse array of platforms that make up the social reality for young people online (Zhao et al., 2016).

It is apparent therefore that there is a need to understand how these curated design features are being engaged with to present identity. Goffman's (1959) research suggests that social identity presentation is largely location specific, and that the presentation of identity can change from location to location as the audience for that presentation shifts. The data from this research however suggests that there is a need to alter the manner in which we consider the locationally-specific nature of identity performances, particularly in highly curated online spaces. The presentation of identity is not just a result of the performer considering the appropriate performance for the given location. Identity performance is instead enmeshed with, bound to, and emergent from that location. This means that the identity is not just something that happens to take place on a stage, but something that emerges from specifics of that stage. The presentation of identity online is therefore inseparable from the location in which it emerges; it is resultant from the interplay between user and design.

In this manner, Comic Book Theory adopts the sensibility towards the non-human that Latour (2005) argues is crucial for the ongoing development of sociology, and that is all the more necessary when considering identity performances in heavily curated and designed spaces. The identity performances unpacked in the analysis were phenomena reducible to neither the human nor the non-human parts but were the result of the enmeshing between these elements. The impact of the non-human can clearly not be ignored online, and the participants showed that they were grappling with many of these elements in a considered manner. However, the misleadingly named Actor-Network Theory does not provide a workable theoretical frame to unpack this enmeshing on human and non-human. Instead, ANT merely notes that researchers should attempt to pay attention to the non-human, and not diminish or under-estimate the ability of these elements to impact the social. Latour, perhaps purposefully given the complicated nature and macro implications of the subject matter, offers no workable framework to account for the non-human in the formation of the social. Comic Book Theory addresses this need for an account of the non-human, and crucially offers a workable and flexible model to unpack and account for the enmeshing of human and non-human. It does so in a fashion that allows for variation in the performance but that also unpacks why this variation is present through the concept of a locationally-bound performance that is enacted by users with their own socio-cultural resources. The implications of Comic Book Theory for future digital research are therefore apparent in that it considers identity performances that are enacted through the features available online, and provide a frame to unpack how users are presenting flexible, multiple, and malleable identities on this growing range of platforms. This sensibility towards design allows the researcher to consider why and how users engage with certain features, and to what effect.

The data show that the trade-offs between location and performer that result in locationally-bound performances need to be accounted for in a nuanced manner that allows for variation in the performance, variation in the user, and variation in location. Comic Book Theory provides such a consideration, allowing us to unpack and consider this nuance in a manner which is malleable and non-deterministic. Malleability is crucial given that it is established that users can be widely variable in terms of their socio-cultural backgrounds, which they bring with them to these platforms. It is also crucial given that the platforms themselves are largely variable in how they frame social interaction and in how they allow the user to act and interact. The approach towards the enmeshing of these factors therefore needs to be equally malleable and account for how these variable factors can combine. Closure provides the framework through which to consider this negotiation between user and design in a malleable manner. It accounts for the manner in which design can vary, allowing the user more or less space in which to present identity, and offering them an array of features to guide the creation of the identity narrative. It also accounts for the manner in which the user can vary, bringing different extratextual and intertextual resources with them to the identity performance.

The need for this malleable approach bears out in the data, with the platforms and the users enmeshing to create unique performances that changed across time, across users, and across platforms. Comic Book Theory not only captures this variety but importantly allows a workable framework for a consideration of why and how this variety emerge from the interplay and trade-offs between myriad combinations of user and location. In this manner, Comic Book Theory is also non-deterministic in its approach. It is apparent from the analysis that the participants did not act and use the spaces in a uniform manner. There were a variety of in the approach taken towards the platform that resulted in vastly different performances enacted for a variety of reason. Design features were not engaged with in a uniform manner and did not affect participants uniformly. Instead, the final performance was a

negotiation between user and design, sometimes meaning negotiating content creation or sacrificing privacy. Further to this, tracking the participants over the course of the year allowed for a greater consideration of this flexibility, and was vital for showing the shifting nature of this negotiation between design and user. The data highlighted the need for a model that could unpack the complexities of the relationship between human and non-human in a manner that allowed for changes over time, platform, and user. This therefore suggests that, though trends can be found in large data samples in regards to how certain features are engaged with, there is a need to consider the subtleties of this engagement. This research further notes that this is best considered from the perspective of the users, as it is their interpretation of how they engage with the features that reveals the importance of these for their actions and interactions online.

Given that Comic Book Theory allows us a practical and usable model to consider the enmeshing of user and design, this chapter will now move on to discuss the implications of two of the key aspects of Comic Book Theory that emerged through the analysis of the data set; closure and the impact of design.

6.3. The importance of closure.

Through the analysis it was apparent that a broad approach towards social media comes hand-in-hand with a broad approach towards the social experiences in these spaces. The social experiences of the participants were indeed largely variable across the range of platforms, with participants using different platforms to interact with a range of users around a variety of topics. This included interacting and 'networking' with known contacts, but also importantly involved interacting with a wider variety of contacts around interests and hobbies. Given this, the research notes that there is a need to consider social media beyond networking with established offline contacts (Bright et al., 2014). Though this forms

an important aspect of social interaction online, it is clear that this is a specific aspect of online social

reality. Networking with established offline contacts has been the focus of much of the research into

online experiences in recent years as social media becomes a tool for the continuation of social capital

(Croitoru et al., 2015; Dabbagh et al., 2016; Trottier & Lyon, 2012). However, this research suggests that

the participant's experiences were broader than this an included an array of interactions with varied and

included wider audiences, engaged with for a variety of social aims.

In terms of how we consider social experiences online it is clear that online research must consider

multiple definitions of 'social', and not overly prioritise one specific method of engagement with and

through these platforms. Social uses of the Internet are diverse and readily apparent, and it is clear that

social media fulfils an array of equally important social aspects for the users beyond just networking

with established offline contacts (Barnes, 2015; Zhao et al., 2016). Importantly, this research notes that

not only were there broad variations in the participants' social engagements across platforms, there

were also broad variation *within* platforms. Platforms were not used in a uniform manner, and different

participants used the platforms for a variety of different social features, informed by the specific

extratextual resources they bought with them to commit closure. Some participants for example chose

only to follow established offline friends on Twitter, and some chose only to follow celebrities and those

with similar interests. Some participants chose to allow their colleagues on Facebook, and others chose

to restrict this to more professional websites such as a professionally-fronted Twitter accounts or to

LinkedIn. The engagement with the platforms is therefore realised in an individual manner by different

participants, informed by their extratextual situation. It appears then that not only can we not

generalise the type of social interactions witnessed in SNS to social media writ large but we also cannot

generalise *within* SNS as types of social interaction may differ (Blank & Lutz, 2016; García-Martín &

García-Sánchez, 2015). This further highlights the need to consider social interactions on a platform-by-

platform basis, and importantly, to not over-estimate the importance of networking with established contacts at the expense of other social experiences online.

Having a range of participants active on the same platform therefore allowed for an exploration of this notion, and revealed that platforms served multiple social uses and audiences for the participants, grounded in their own specific socio-cultural situation which they bought to bear on their engagement with the platforms. This included importantly accounting for the growing notion of context collapse that was a factor in the interactions of many of the participants (Davis & Jurgenson, 2014; Utz, 2015), with multiple aspects of the participant's lives converging upon some of the more popular platforms. Context collapse was noted as a factor that largely affected the identity performances of the participants, shaping how and why they engaged with the platforms to present identity. Brandon notes for example: *"I do worry about future problems. Like if a boss sees my posts or something, so I try and keep that in mind when I'm typing".* It was apparent that the participants were largely aware of the audience for their interactions and shaped their performances accordingly. This then confirms Goffman's (1959) notion of situationally specific identity performed for a given audience. However, it is worth noting that this convergence is only present due to the unique nature of the internet, again highlighting the need to consider social interaction online in situ as a phenomenon that emerges through and with the platforms, not on them.

With a growing array of users present on increasingly popular social media platforms (Perrin, 2015), there is a growing need to prioritise the notion of closure and extratextuality when considering identity performances online. In order to understand why certain messages are expressed and sent, even upon platforms that are ostensibly considered 'networking' sites, an understanding of the user's specific

socio-cultural context was necessary. In this manner this research largely questions any divide between the online and the offline. Through discussions of context collapse and the manner in which the user's extratextual socio-cultural resources affects their specific closure online, it was apparent that the offline and the online are not discrete realms, but are constantly bleeding into each other. The data shows that the specificities and differences of the online realm need to be considered in order to understand a user's action within that space, but crucially also reveals that the users are grounded within the offline and bring this to bear on their engagement with the online. The notion of closure therefore provides a necessary new lens through which to unpack this relationship between specific spaces and socio-culturally grounded users, and in the process challenges the notion of digital duality (Jurgenson, 2012; Pond, 2016), by arguing that the online is necessarily and continually grounded in the offline realms by the user's engagement with both of these realms. As such, the performance is inseparable from the performer, who is grounded in the offline. In this manner it is apparent that the offline realm does more than just bleed into the offline, it informs our actions and interactions, and shapes our approach, our reading, our uses, and engagement. They are at all times, linked. As such, this research notes online interactions cannot be understood without a consideration of the socio-culturally grounded (inter)actor.

This is all the more evident when considering Molly's case. It was apparent that the change in context that Molly underwent from home to university changed her engagement with social media and her approach to the platforms. She began to follow new users online that were pertinent to her course, and also began engaging with new platforms to maintain contact with her friends. In this regard, her usage of the platforms could not be separated from her given situation. Brandon too noted that a change in offices lead to different approaches towards what was appropriate to share online. Indeed, most participants suggested that their offline socio-cultural grounding augmented their online actions and interactions in some manner. Following the participants over the course of a year revealed that their

engagements with the platform were largely temporally and socio-culturally bound. Future research in this area could therefore consider the effect of specific socio-cultural shifts - such as educational transitions - on social media use. Such changes in situation bring with them evident changes in social needs and concerns. A focus upon a specific shift in socio-cultural situation could allow for comparison across subjects undergoing the same socio-cultural shift, and could provide insights into specific concerns and patterns of change during this time. This research predicts that, much as in the case of Molly, the transitions may affect the manner in which social media is utilise, further confirming the need for a consideration of closure and extratextuality when approaching online identity performances.

In this regard, the variety of social experience online were particularly useful when considering identity performance, as it enabled the observation of identity variation and a range of social experiences, and allowed an observation of how identity was malleable to the given needs of the situation. Through the interview process I was able to unpack the links between the participant's perception of the social needs of a given situation and a given platform, and understand how this affected their actions and interactions. This in essence provided the ability to explore the concept of closure, looking at how the participants read and completed the narrative from the framework laid out before them, and looking at what information they bought with them to complete the identity presentation. It was crucial that this be understood from the perspective of the participants, as it was their specific commitment of closure that was necessary to understand why they presented themselves in the manner they did at that given time within that specific location. In doing so, my interpretations and assumptions of these spaces were not imposed upon the participants and the research was able to explore how these spaces were read and understood by the participants.

Understanding the participants' contextualisation of these platforms was therefore vital to proceed to unpack their actions and interactions within those spaces. Through this process, it became apparent that the participants' contextualisations of the platforms were widely variable and dependent upon their specific situation. Work, studying, friendship groups, and family were all noted as aspects that shaped how and why the participants were engaging with the features. Their uses of the platforms were not uniform, as different concerns shaped how they committed closure and completed the narrative. It is not simply enough therefore to note which features are engaged with. There is a need to understand why these specific features are used in the manner they are. Closure in this regard helped to unpack the participants' engagement with the features of the website, with the participants bringing their own specific contexts to their engagement with the platforms. Through the interviews it was apparent that the extratextual situation of the participants varied, and that their specific situation affected how and why they engaged with the features.

The concept of closure and extratextuality then allows for a consideration of the enmeshing of user and design, placing the emphasis upon how the design is interpreted and understood by the user, which in turn affect how they engage with the platforms to present identity. In this manner, the design of the platform is enmeshed with the user to produce unique identity performances. The idea of completing the narrative through closure avoids determinism whilst still allowing for a consideration of how the performance is necessarily bound to the space in which it emerges, thus acknowledging and accounting for the real and tangible impact of design. As such, the concept of closure presents a usable and flexible frame with which to understand how the users understand, manage, and negotiate their identities, their interactions, and their actions online in line with their specific needs and situations. Future research should consider therefore accounting for the role of extratextuality in informing how identities are realised online.

6.4. Impact of design - negotiated boundaries.

The data suggests that not only does the role of the design need to be accounted for, but that it needs to be considered in a nuanced manner. It was apparent that it was through the negotiated enmeshing of user and design that the identity performance emerged. It is critical therefore that research consider the specificities of a given platform, as the platforms are curated and designed to allow certain manners of acting and interacting. However, it is equally apparent that this consideration is done in a manner that allows for an awareness of closure and a non-deterministic approach.

In terms of a consideration of the impact of design, the analysis revealed a number of ways in which identity performances were constrained and mediated by the design of the platforms, and highlighted that the given performances could not be considered in isolation from the platforms through which they emerged. The participants revealed their awareness of the restrictions of design on their use of the platforms. For example, Brandon noted of Twitter that *"character limitation does an awful lot to restrict what I would otherwise would have posted about, like the topics I would otherwise post about, because I can't put context into it".* In this manner, it was clear that the design affected how the social was enacted and how the users considered and approach identity performances online. For example, Brian discussed the presence of hashtags on Twitter, noting that their specific functionality made communicating during and about big events online a lot easier. Similarly, Isabel highlighted the temporal nature and fast pace of twitter as restricting how she presented identity, noting she chose not to include pictures as "*I don't really see the point in it on Twitter cos it's gone in a second".*

The findings here therefore match those of previous research in noting that design and situation affects social action (Karimov et al., 2011), with participants able to engage with an array of features to present identity (Stroud et al., 2016) specific to the given platform (Lafkioui, 2013). The research noted that the growing range of platforms "afford a variety of tools that potentially extend and compromise impression management" (Mendelson & Papachrissi, 2011, 254). One particular feature that was highlighted in this regard was the presence of groups on Facebook that allowed for the segregation and isolation of discussion to a dedicated location, allowing for slower and more dedicated discussion around that given topic.

Further to this, the interactions with design features were noted as being platform-specific. It was found that even if different platforms had common features, there was still variation and specificity in the manners in which the participants approached the platform and the features. In this regard the findings confirm the work of researchers such as Van Dijck's (2013), who noted that though SNSs can share similar modes, the arrangement and presentation of these modes will affect how they are utilised and how identity is presented. This was found to be evident by the participants, who despite being offered the ability to 'write' their identity on both Facebook and Twitter, chose to engage with the features in different ways, based upon how they understood and contextualised the given platforms. The same feature was therefore given different prioritisation and consideration on each platform, in line with the specific contextualisation of that platform by the user. As such, it is clear that the user of features cannot be assumed to be uniform across platforms, and should be instead considered and situated on a platform-by-platform basis. Adding further nuance to this notion is the need to consider the use of third-party applications which augment the presentation of the platforms, further making any conclusions about the specific uses of design features questionable. The presence of third party apps presents a unique and emergent challenge to discussion around the relationship between design and

social interaction. This research therefore highlights this as potential area of future exploration, with a consideration of the effects of variation in the presentation of a given platform via the use of third party applications likely to provide some insight into how the presentation of features can affect online action and interaction.

However, it appears that a consideration of the growing array of design features only considers one end of the equation of identity creation and that, in order to understand the impact of design, a more nuanced model is needed. Rather than present a full deterministic approach to identity performance, this research was keen to instead fulfil Latour's (2005) insistence to afford equal consideration to the non-human, but to do so in a manner that was considered and nuanced, with an awareness of the social as situationally bound and emergent. With this in mind, it is clear that there is a need to acknowledge, as Mendelson and Papachrissi (2011) rightfully do, that the array of features online only offer the *potential* to extend and compromise impression management. Scott McCloud (1993) suggests that when reading comic books, the designer presents the narrative in a series of juxtaposed images that suggest the narrative, but that it is in the gutter between these images that the participant becomes involved in finishing and fulfilling the narrative potential, creating a cohesive whole that is informed by their specific extratextuality and intertextuality. Comic Book Theory proposes that the same approach should be taken to online design, and demands that we not only give a consideration to design, but that we understand how the potential of this design is understood by the user of that space, and what this interpretation means for subsequent identity performances.

As such, it should be noted that although no trends can be unpacked as to the specific effects of specific features from a small sample size, this research questions the notion of such conclusions as reached in

previous papers (Coles & West, 2016; Ksiazek et al., 2014) which claim certain features will have a uniform given effect upon an audience. Whilst we may be able to say that the potential for interactivity is greater through certain features, or that with the presence of this feature, interactivity increases on a platform, this research suggests that a feature is nothing without an actor, and an actor nothing without staging and props on and through which to perform. It is through the enmeshing of these factors that the social performance of identity emerges. For example, in the analysis it was noted that despite platforms often being set up explicitly to encourage users to produce content, a fact noted by a number of researchers across a range of platforms (Fogg & Iizawa, 2008; Keenan & Shiri, 2009; Mazer et al., 2007), Molly chose not to fulfil this potential and used the platform in her own manner for her own social purposes. This means, in essence, that an overt prioritisation of humans when looking at interactivity online is problematic in that it denies the very real effects of design, but that equally, an overt focus upon the technological features that afford interactivity is also problematic, and does little to provide equal consideration to both the human and non-human in the creation of the social (Latour, 2005). Comic Book Theory then provides us with a frame that allows for, and demands, an active consideration of both these elements in a manner that considers that features constrain and guide our available interactions, but that also acknowledges that these are realised on an individual person-by-person basis through the concept of closure. This consideration of this is all the more necessary at a time when experiences and audiences are diversifying online, bringing with them myriad combinations of human and non-human, enmeshing to create specific identity performances.

One of the most pertinent aspects of design that was discussed through the analysis was the negotiation of boundaries between user and design that resulted in materially heterogeneous elements becoming completed identity performances (Barad, 2007). Through Comic Book Theory's overt consideration of these boundaries this research was able to unpack the trade-off and compromises present between user

and design. Again this was realised in an individual manner between user and platform, with the negotiating of the boundaries flexible across both platforms and participants.

One of the interesting aspects that arose from the data in this regard was the ability of the participants to control audiences, again realised in a different manner of different platforms. On Facebook for example, some participants noted they took advantage of the ability to send specific content to specific audiences, and that this meant they could be sure that the content was received by the exact intended recipients. The trade-off between control of audience and public participation revealed a variety of methods for creating boundaried performances. Some participants were willing to make sacrifices and accept the lack of control and privacy that they deemed necessary to partake actively online. Others were more fervent in patrolling and setting boundaries, either by utilising design features to safeguard privacy at the behest of full public engagement, or by curtailing their content with an awareness of a wider audience. It was clear that there were trade-offs and compromises reached between user and design in terms of the boundaries of identity performances. Molly for example decided that she would not post anything online unless she had full control over the exact recipients of the message, hence her adoption of platforms such a Snapchat upon moving to university. She noted however that this decision led to her not fully being able to take advantage of the platform's more overtly social elements. As such, she ultimately ceded the ability of public participation to maintain control and privacy, and noted that, if she could not reach an accord between her needs and the affordances of the media form, she would not participate.

This in some ways confirms Goffman's (1959) notion that identity is crafted for a specific audience, but also importantly adds an overt awareness that the audience emerges in a specific location, tied to the

design and constraints of that location. Whilst this research is keen to question digital duality, it is worth

noting therefore that the translation of offline reality into the online realm is not a direct and perfect

translation, but instead it is a specific translation, that has the effect of emphasising certain aspects and

minimising the importance of others. As such, though it is clear that clear that the offline is translated

online, future research should consider unpacking what aspects of the offline are overtly emphasised,

and which aspects are minimised, with a consideration of what the effects of this may be (See Dyer,

2015). It should not be assumed that offline reality is presented neutrally online. The internet is always

and purposefully curated, and an awareness of this must be held, particularly when tying the emergence

of audience to the design of platform, given that, through design, certain communities may be

minimised or silenced on specific platforms (See Dyer, 2016).

Through the notions of closure and boundaries, Comic Book Theory provides a nuanced case-by-case

consideration of the role that specific media forms and designs of social media play in mediating, and/or

control identity and action online, and more importantly, provides a model through which we can

unpack this process. It reveals that there are strategies to manage this, and that they are negotiated on

a user-by-user, platform-by-platform basis. Comic Book Theory allows us to unpack this through the

consideration of personal boundary creation in materially heterogeneous identity presentations. This

thesis suggests that the negotiation of boundaries should continue to be explored online, as this process

reveals the tactics, trade-off, and compromises involved the enmeshing of user and design into a

coherent identity performance.

6.5. Technology guiding performances - user mileage may vary.

Beyond a consideration of the role of design upon the realisation of specific identity performances, this research was also keen to account for the effect of the devices through which the participants were engaging with social media. This was necessary given that research suggests that the development and progression of devices can be tracked concurrently with changes and developments in our internet uses and habits (Anderson, 2015). It was highlighted in the literature review that as technology changes and progresses (Dourish, 1998) so too does our engagement with the internet as we are able to do progressively more and more through these spaces (Green et al., 2015; Nunes, 2011). Trends have been noted for example in regards to consumption patterns (Lenhart, 2015) and use of aspects such as selfies and visual aspects (Katz & Crocker, 2015). As such, it was noted that there was a need to consider if and how the devices through which young people were accessing these platforms alter their uses. Several key findings were discussed in this regard.

It was noted for example that there was a need to consider that social media was generally not being engaged with in prolonged sit-down sessions. With a growth in mobile technologies it was apparent that the participants' habits revolved around checking and browsing social media on a regular basis through mobile devices. Browsing was highlighted as a key aspect of social media consumption for the participants, and made up the large part of their reported social media engagement, largely through mobile technology. Indeed, this trend was readily apparent for some of the participants, such as Brian, who noted the use of his mobile exclusively for browsing, and a laptop or desktop computer for actual content production. This was enacted for a variety of reasons, including checking on their peers, and keeping up with news as it happens. Indeed, it could be argued that the 'always connected' nature of social media, notably prevalent in young people in regards to their use of mobile phones (Cheug, 2016) has largely lead to the trend of social media for the consumption of news as it happens. A number of studies have revealed a tendency in recent years towards news consumption and production via social

media (Hermida et al., 2012). Social media has even been noted for some as their main source of news consumption (Harder et al., 2016). Future research should continue to study and unpack how social media habits change with the implementation of technology.

This tendency towards browsing had implications for how the data were collected, neglecting the possibility for naturalistic observations of the use of these platforms. Therefore, instead of observations, the uses of the devices were discussed during the interviews with the participants. It is recommended for future studies that the browsing habits of participants should be taken into consideration, and that research should be adaptable in regards to how best to capture the engagement of the participants.

Beyond the tendency towards browsing social media, it was apparent from the analysis that there was little comparable engagement with technology by the participants. Instead, the engagements with technology were realised in a unique manner from participant to participant. This of course does not mean that technology did not affect aspects of the participant' use of social media, but merely that it affected them in a variety of manners. For some, aspects such as the better cameras or clearer interfaces lead to changes in how they engaged online. For others, such as Brandon, the differences were negligible. Arguably one of the larger shifts in technology was shown in Molly's case, moving from a joint family computer to a phone and eventually a personal laptop. Whilst some changes were noted in how she approached social media, it was noticeable that there were little changes in her engagement with the platforms for social interaction and social functions. However, for others, the changes were larger and more articulated. Brandon for example noted a change from a computer to a phone which change his attitude towards the platforms, noting:

"I think my habits are possibly changing because previously I'd only have bothered with one sort of social media site and the other two that have come along sort of snapchat as well if you include it have been purely since I've had a phone and I've got access to all of them at the same time".

As such, it appears use of technology is bound to the user. Whilst larger samples may again be able to highlight specific trends in changes over time, Comic Book Theory argues for a more nuanced and grounded consideration of the engagement with technology. In doing so it avoids the deterministic view of the effects of the medium as presented by McLuhan (1964) and others. Instead, Comic Book Theory demands that we look at this engagement on an individual scale to instead consider how the enmeshing of user and technology produces unique engagements. As the data bears out, an understanding of the use of technology cannot be gained through a consideration of the technology alone, as though technology makes certain uses easier and more apparent, the use of these features will ultimately be fulfilled by the user in an individual manner. For example, Molly was arguably able to produce more content with a dedicated mobile device than she might have been able to on a joint family computer, however, her production habits showed no considerable change between the devices. Similarly, however, Comic Book Theory in this regard does not place undue attention upon the human alone. Indeed, it should be made apparent that the use of the internet obviously cannot be done without these devices, each of which come with their own restrictions and challenges. What Comic Book Theory aptly allows us to consider however is the nature in which these restrictions are dealt with by the user, and the manner in which each user negotiates their own uses of their devices.

Beyond this, it is worth contextualising the devices can be tied to specific purpose for users. This again came through in Molly's case, as the joint family computer was consigned largely to homework for her. Similarly, Willow noted that her desktop computer was reserved for playing videogames, and therefore she tended not to use the desktop for social media. Given this, this research notes that technology can often be found to be bound to the specific context and situation of the user (Chinn & Fairlie, 2010). Therefore, this data finds that there is a need to consider the difference between 'having' and 'having access to' different technologies in terms of a user's engagement with them. Merely noting the availability of technology (See Lenhart, 2015), is not enough to presume use and engagement. As such, this thesis notes that there is a need to account for the fact that different technology can have different meaning and contexts to the user, affecting how they engage with it. Again then, in order to understand social media use, there is a need to ground the technology in the socio-cultural concerns of the user at a given time and location.

A further point in regards to the use of technology for social media consumption became apparent through the analysis of the data, namely the notion that the platforms were not presented in a uniform manner across technologies. The presentation of a platform was noted as being variable from one platform to the next, and in this regard, it was noted that the participants' engagement with the platforms would change based on how the platform was presented, and which features were easily accessible and emphasised. This is worth accounting for, especially as the participants noted they preferred to use different devices for different platform due to the design. Sally, for example, noted that "*it's easier to browse other people's pages on your computer than it is on your phone*". Again, this was dependent upon the user. So for Nina for example, the iPhone was noted as being "*easier that the actual desktop layout".* Care therefore should be taken when considering platform use, even when following one participant, as their usage may vary based upon the technology through which the user is

accessing the platforms. Given that the platforms are not universally presented across technology, future research may wish to consider that, in order to understand the use of a social media platform, or the engagement with specific features, there is a need to considering the devices through which these features are accessed.

This thesis holds therefore that it is the enmeshing of the technological devices and the individual users through which the engagement with social media emerges. Whilst these participants in some manner highlight McLuhan's (1964) suggestion that technology will affect how we act and interact, it would appear that, as highlighted by a number of critics (Marchessault, 2004; Shaw, 1999), this will not happen in a uniform manner, and individual variation must be accounted for. As such, it is clear there is a need to consider the technology on a user-by-user basis.

6.6. Multiple platforms.

The data matches findings from other studies (Carr & Hayes, 2015; Lenhart, 2015), in reflecting that young people are currently using multiple platforms for social interaction. All participants made use of at least two social media platforms during the study, with some using up to nine different platforms. Whilst it is readily apparent that Facebook and Twitter are popular (all participants used Facebook and Twitter in some capacity), and that they are currently an integral aspect of social interaction, this research highlights that a focus on these two platforms alone is not enough to understand the entirety of young peoples' diverse experiences of social media. A need to move beyond a focus on one or two platforms is all the more apparent given the growing array of platforms through which users can now interact (Zhao et al., 2016), each offering different ways of expressing identity, consuming and

producing content, and socially interacting. As such, not only is there a need to consider a broad approach towards social media, particularly when considering the social media uses of young people (Wartella et al., 2016), it is also clear that there is a need to consider the specificities of these platforms in their own right and to examine the diversity of experiences and uses they can offer.

The broad array of platforms and spaces that need to be considered when approaching social media research is starkly apparent when considering how the participants defined social media. Even within a small sample, the variety of approaches towards social media was readily apparent, with the participants' definitions of social media reflecting the diversity of their experiences online. Asking the participants to define social media therefore revealed an important consideration for future research into social media; that the researcher's conception and understanding of social media may not match the user, and that a consideration of how participants conceive of social media may aid an understanding of their engagements with and through the platforms. It is apparent that there are a variety of approaches towards defining social media, and that social media is not understood or used uniformly by users. As such, it seems odd that research should attempt to take a uniform approach towards social media when collecting data. Doing so risks prioritising a certain approach over other equally legitimate understandings of social media. It is suggested therefore that a similar approach, placing the definition and scope of social media in the hands of participants, should be taken by future research in order to understand what these spaces mean to the participants. Asking the participants to define social media allowed this research to consider what social media was to the participants, and helped in an understanding of how they conceived of these spaces. As Lefebvre (1991) notes, understanding how social spaces are conceived of by the users of that space can help better reveal and unpack the practises enacted within those spaces.

Interestingly, the data suggests that researchers should be particularly careful when gathering data from Facebook alone and generalising from this, as several participants suggested that Facebook was in fact noticeably different to other social platforms. In essence, the uniqueness of Facebook made the platform an outlier in their social experiences online; it was the exception, not the rule. It was therefore engaged with in a different manner from other platforms. As Brian put it:

> "I guess they're all kinda the same, but all other social media feel like (.) community. And if you're not talking it's just (.) it's snooping without being part of that community. I don't know. It just feels (.) Facebook is different".

Brandon also expresses similar sentiments, noting:

> "I think twitter and Instagram, I think, they're a lot more specialised (.) in the way that they are designed, whereas Facebook feels a lot more kind of generic".

Researchers should therefore show caution when using Facebook as an example of social media. As the social experiences of young people online are increasingly diversifying (Zhao et al., 2016), research should be cautious about relying too heavily on one platform alone, which whilst popular, appears to be a somewhat unique experience. Indeed, Comic Book Theory problematizes any easy generalisation about social media from one platform alone, highlighting that no platform should be generalised from as users and platforms combine to make a unique performance. It is apparent therefore that, when considering social interaction online, there is a need to consider a broad array of platforms and account for the multiple experiences of the users.

6.7. More than content production.

All of the participants discussed using a range of various platforms for social interaction online. What was most apparent from the discussion of their engagements across this range of platforms was the role

that browsing and consumption played for the participants. Browsing was a noticeably popular use of the platform. Indeed, for the participants, it constitutes the main use of these platforms for a range of reasons, including boredom, news gathering, and awareness of peer activity. In this regard, the findings of this thesis support the claims of multiple recent papers (Čičević et al., 2016; Lu et al., 2016) in highlighting the important role that browsing plays in the consumption of social media by young people. This thesis holds that browsing and consumption should not be ignored, and should be accounted for when considering the role of social media in social life.

Though for some of the participants the public content they produced was not sizable, the social functions these platforms served were tangible and important. It was noted that browsing served a social function for the participants. In the case of Molly, for example, browsing was largely her only engagement with the platforms. Yet she noted that she followed three separate platforms to keep up to date with the various social aspects of her friends that were posted across these three platforms. For Molly, browsing enabled her to gain this social knowledge and to feel connected with her peers. This raises many issues with regards to how we treat online data. It is so tempting and easy to take a 'big data' view towards collecting and processing social media data in order to look for emergent trends in topics and content. However, the data that is often captured through trawling this produced content cannot be considered representative of the reality of social media for users (Ngai et al., 2015). Research suggests that content production cannot be considered representative of the usage patterns of many users, a fact that this research supports. Therefore the aspect that is under analysis in much of the big data research appears not only to be a portion of the overall social media reality of users, but importantly appears to not even constitute the main aspect of social media engagement. With the increased prevalence of mobile technology (Perrin, 2015) and the use of social media for a range of social function including news and social consumption (Utz, 2015), it is apparent that in order to

understand the action and interaction of social media users, one cannot simply sit at the other side of a screen and read their posts. Browsing as such can no longer be ignored from sociological research online. More than this, it is apparent that content production should not be over-emphasised and considered with undue focus.

Of course, it is important to note that this is not just an issue for large scale qualitative data, but also for small-scale, in depth, and ethnographic research online. Kozinets (2010) approach towards 'netnography' has a popular method for observing online communities, and continues to be utilised to gather insights into the manner in which social communities form online (See Bartl et al., 2016). Kozinets (2010) proposes that to gather the richest data, there is a need to actively seek out those users and communities who produce a wealth of content. Whilst this is understandable if one is just viewing the community in-situ of the website, it is apparent that this is increasingly proven to be a-typical for social media engagement, and that equally rich data that is more representative of the average engagement with social media can be gathered from understanding and considering users who do not actively produce content. If we are to study social media in its entirety this means studying it is its actualised and repetitive mundanity. Whilst produced content is readily apparent and obvious when viewing these spaces, research should be able to lose its bias towards this fixation, and begin to unpack the mundane and consumptive reality of social media in the lives of users, which, as this data reveals, can be equally rich and varied, and can reveal a great deal about social media use and social media users.

Chapter 7 - Key Contributions and Conclusion

7.1. Research Questions.

This thesis set out to address a number of research questions focused around the identity performance of young people using social media:

1) How are the online identity performances, actions, and interactions of a group of 16-25 year olds on online social media platforms co-constructed and negotiated by the interactions between the user, the technologies they use to access these sites, and the sites themselves?

2) What role do the specific media forms and designs of social media play in mediating, and/or control identity and action online; are there resistances/strategies against this?

3) How do individual users understand, manage, and importantly negotiate their identities, their interactions, and their actions online given the vary media affordances?

4) How are these identity performances accessed and maintained online, and how does this method of access affect the formation, actions, and interactions of these performances?

5) How do participants understand, define, and negotiate social media?

It is clear from this research that the answer to question 1 is rather nuanced and variable, and can be answered through a consideration of both question 2 and 3. By this I mean that the identity performances of young people online were expressed and represented through the use of an array of platform-specific design features, and that the participants engaged with these features in a variety of manners, inspired and influenced by their particular socio-cultural resources and issues that they bought to this platform. To answer question 1 therefore requires an equally nuanced consideration of identity. As such, this thesis proposes Comic Book Theory, a framework that considers how myriad platform-

specific heterogeneous features become enmeshed with a socio-culturally grounded user to produce unique and malleable identity performance.

In this regard, the specific media forms and designs guided the identity performances of the users, and framed what was possible within these specific platforms. In terms of strategies and resistances to these design elements, it was again noted that this was engaged with on a user-by-user, platform-by-platform basis, with the boundaries of the identity performances negotiated between the user and the design. This meant at times accepting the design of the platforms as unchangeable and *de riguer,* and other times, utilising features to maintain more control over the identity through design. The user's individual negotiation of identity with design was ongoing, and was susceptible to change based on shifts in their socio-cultural situations and resources. In this manner, to answer questions 2 & 3, the identity performances were noted as being always and necessarily bound to the design of the platforms, but also realised in an individual manner by socio-culturally grounded users.

It was noted that the effects of the devices used to access these platforms was again variable based upon the user and their given needs and situation. Key findings in regards to the technology noted that the social media platforms were not consistent across devices, but could largely vary, affecting how the user approached and utilised the platforms. It was also noted that the attitudes towards technology were not neutral but instead that technology could be assigned specific roles and functions by the user, again affecting their engagement with these devices. As such, this research notes that a consideration of the use of technology needs to situate the technology and account a variety of uses and purposes that may affect how it is engaged with.

Finally, rather than seeking out a particular type of participant, this research allowed the participants to explain the role that social media played for them. it was noted that the participants' definitions of social media were broad, in line with the variety of social roles that these platforms played in their lives. All participants utilised multiple platforms for a variety of reasons. Importantly, these extended beyond peer-to-peer contact alone, and included heavy browsing of social media and variable levels of content production. This thesis notes then that any consideration of social media should adopt broad approach towards the topic to understand a variety of engagements with the growing array of platforms that young people utilise.

7.2. Limitations.

This thesis acknowledges a number of limitations with regards to the data collection and analysis process, from which there are steps that future research conducted using Comic Book Theory to understand social interaction online should consider. The interviews were recorded onto a mobile phone for the analysis process. This decision was taken as this was readily available to the researcher and, more importantly, was deemed to not be overly intrusive to the participants during the interview process. This was apparent during the data collection, as, anecdotally, a number of participants noted that they felt considerably at ease with the presence of a mobile phone in the room. However, it was apparent when transcribing the interviews that the sound quality of the captured interviews was often not ideal, and at times, completely unintelligible. This was largely apparent in the interview held in more public locations, with background noise being a noticeable issue in this regard. Ultimately then, this appears to be a trade of between keeping the interviews comfortable and less imposing, and gaining better sound quality from a more apparent recording device. Hopefully, as technology continues to improve, this will become less of an issue.

What was more problematic in regards to the use of a phone as a recording device was the loss and corruption of data incurred after the initial round of interviews. Due to technological difficulties, all-bar-one of the first round of interviews with the participants were lost, meaning only 26 out of the 35 total conducted interviews could be recovered and transcribed. This was a lesson in the unreliability and unpredictability of technology, and though suitable steps were taken to capture and back-up the data, ultimately technology is not infallible and issues can still arise with the capturing and transferring of data. In future, it is suggested that, where possible, it is safer if data is recorded and stored directly onto a suitable cloud-based storage. This was enacted from the second round of interviews onwards, further minimising the possibility of future data corruption during transference.

As the data was collected over the course of a year, it became difficult to keep track of all of the participants over this period. Over the research period, the participants underwent natural life progressions including moving location and gaining a range of responsibilities and obligations that made appointing suitable times for data collection difficult. This lead to some participants not being able to make meetings over the year and missing a round of interviews. Due to this natural fluctuation in the lives of the participants, one participant left early on in the process due to a lack of ongoing availability. Of the remaining nine participants a range of sessions were held in line with their availability. This ultimately meant I managed to record a total of 34 interviews out of an ideal 45 with the nine participants. With the data corruption from the first round of interviews, this was reduced to 26 total interviews. This was deemed a suitable amount for analysis, and the data that was produced was ultimately useful and rich. Further to this, it was apparent through analysis that collecting the data over this extended period of a year helped to track changes in the socio-cultural situation of the participants, which lead to the ability for a direct consideration of the socio-culturally bound nature of online interaction. Given that identity is malleable, it was important and useful to see these changes in action,

and to consider their impact upon the online actions and interactions of the participants. Whilst ideally

the participants would have been able to complete the full course of interviews, the semi-structured

nature of the interviews allowed for a consideration of the themes on an ongoing basis with the

participants, and allowed me to adapt the interviews to meet the given availability of the participants.

A further limitation is apparent with the notion of participant selection. The participants were chosen

through 'snowballing', with the initial participants recommending and conscripting other participants

until the target amount was reached. Ultimately, this led to a sample group that evidently is not

representative and that reflected a range of relatively affluent middle-class, mainly university-educated,

and mainly white participants. A wider array of participants would have been useful in order to consider

an array of socio-cultural influences upon social media engagement. Further to this, the precise findings

from this group are evidently not generalizable. This was largely to be expected however, and the

theoretical framework made it apparent that seeking certain types of social media users, such as though

who overtly produce a wealth of content in the style of Kozinets (2010), could be equally problematic.

Instead, this research was keen not to limit the type of participants (other than by age range, obviously)

in order to understand the role that social media played within the lives of a range of participants with a

range of engagements with social media.

While acknowledging these limitations, I would argue that this research makes a number of

contributions to theory and practice in relation to young people's experiences and uses of social media.

7.3. A new, adaptive framework.

Comic Book Theory purposefully provides a framework that it is the flexible and adaptive, and it is noted that any engagement studied should be considered unique to that user, at that given time and place. The approach therefore positions the engagement on a user-by-user basis, and argues against the notion of an easy and generalised statement in regards to social media usage. Given the ability of Comic Book Theory to unpack the interplay between user and design, it is suggested that, in future research, the framework should be explored from a range of socio-cultural backgrounds, including a consideration of users in the global south and users from other age ranges, in order to further explore and test the validity of the theoretical framework. Ultimately, the data produced through the sampling was rich enough to produce a consideration of the enmeshing of user and design, and this approach helped to support the proposal of the theoretical frame. In future, this thesis suggests that their other socio-cultural background be considered to further explore the relationship between user and design.

This thesis began with the aim of unpacking the manner in which young people are using social media to perform identity, particularly focusing upon the role of the platforms in producing specific identity performances. Comic Book Theory, detailed and proposed in this thesis, suggests that this is a nuanced and complicated matter that is influenced by a number of factors, which need to be taken into account to understand the given identity performances, specific to user and platform. It is through Comic Book Theory that we are able to unpack the relationship between user and design in a dedicated and nuanced manner that accounts for many variable complexities. The theoretical frame allows for a consideration of user specificity and platform specificity that ultimately results in malleable identities negotiated between materially heterogeneous elements.

Such an approach is desperately needed at a time when more and more users are present online, and a wider array of platforms are being used. This thesis therefore overtly addresses the trend in digital sociology towards a focus upon only the most popular platforms, and instead demands that research consider that the data being captured on these platforms is intimately linked to the enmeshing of specific user with specific design. Further to this, Comic Book Theory suggests that there are more manners of engaging with platforms socially than merely producing content, and that social media plays may shifting and complicated roles in the social lives of young people. These roles again vary from user to user, platform to platform, and technology to technology. It is therefore vital that we not only consider the nuances at play between user, design, and technology to create specific identity performances, but that we also shift our attention away from the obvious data production to consider wider uses of the platform that are equally important to the user, and in some cases, form the bulk of their engagements with the platforms.

Comic Book Theory ultimately provides a workable, usable, and transferable frame through which to consider and account for design in identity presentation, and through which to consider the role of the non-human, without the research becoming lost in an unending web of connections. Whereas ANT and similar frames have presented the necessity for a shift towards the consideration of the non-human, here Comic Book Theory proposes a workable framework to unpack this and consider to role of the non-human in a nuanced manner with regards to identity presentation. This importantly is presented in a non-deterministic fashion to consider human and non-human enmeshing to create different performance. Identity is ultimately malleable and grounded in the specific space in which it emerges. The performed identity online then is not purely the result of humans. It is guided by the many subtleties and variabilities of design and technology, and equally and is shaped and fulfilled by the user.

Comic Book Theory holds that it is these elements enmeshing that produce an identity performance, and that are continually re-negotiated as the performance plays out.

Through this purposefully adaptive approach, researchers are encouraged to move beyond the consideration of one or two platforms alone, and instead engage with the growing variety of design elements available across a growing range of platforms. This is increasingly important in social media research if we are to examine the role of social media in the daily lives of users. This evidently involves more than just content production, more than just peer-to-peer interaction, and more than just Facebook and Twitter. Indeed, it is noted in this research that Facebook can be considered an a-typical social media experience, and that focusing upon this platform alone may be mis-representative to the diverse online experiences of young people. As such, research needs to move beyond the focus on SNS that pervades digital research and acknowledge the complex reality of social experiences online.

Comic Book Research also notes that that there is a need to problematize the notion of an online/offline divide. By bringing the work of Goffman online it is evident that a performance of identity is always grounded in the socio-cultural reality of the performer. Though there are new spaces, any user who approaches these spaces is always bringing their specific needs and resources with them to these platforms. Nonetheless, the internet and its specific design offers new challenges and issues, and new manners for the offline to manifest itself online. It was noted for example that context collapse was increasingly present online, and that users had to deal with separate elements of their offline realities overlapping in these online spaces. In such a manner, the offline is always present online, but the design features may emphasise certain elements and minimise others, presenting the 'social' in a specific manner. Comic Book Theory offers a framework to unpack this process, and to consider how users react to these issues to present suitable identities to the given audiences.

In this regard, Comic Book Theory addresses the need for a workable framework through which to unpack the many complexities of identity performances online. It is suggested that future research continues to test and explore many of the issues raised through this theoretical framework to examine how users enmesh with their design to perform identity.

7.4. Comic Book Theory's answer to the complexities of ethics in contemporary online research.

As we continue to utilise the internet as a space for research, and as the internet keeps shifting, evolving, and eluding definition, an increasing number of ethical issues are arising. One of the most prominent in recent years has been the re-emergence of the discussion about what data we can and should then have access to and be able to view. This is particularly evident in the quickly growing and increasingly prevalent realm of 'big data', where the staggeringly large wealth of new and archived data produced daily by millions of users worldwide can be churned and manipulated into useful and insightful information about mass trends, public ideas, and public beliefs. But with the increasing reliance upon this sort of large-scale data for mass analysis, questions have arisen over the ethical implications of the use of this public data (boyd and Crawford, 2011; boyd & Marwick, 2011; Zwitter, 2014). The findings from this research equally raise questions for a number of the justifications that the uses of public data are predicated upon, in particular highlighting the lack of a clear public/private divide. It would appear that this divide between public and private is at best porous and at worst impossible to maintain and an ultimately questionable metric for consent.

The appeal of public data is largely understandable from a research standpoint. In many ways it is a researcher's dream; a plethora of easily mineable data that takes minimal collection and that is presented in a consistent and extractable format. The use of public data is also (arguably) largely covered ethically in that this data is shared publicly by the producer of the content on platforms that often cover the use of data for a range of purposes in the end-user agreements. Users have the option to remove themselves from publicly sharing their data and can choose to 'lock' their accounts if they do not wish to share their data publicly (Kramer et al., 2014). Many 'big data' researchers therefore argue that there are readily available opt-in security measures, that the data is largely public by choice, and that open access and treatment of data to for a data-rich environment can be a positive for research (Fairfield & Shtein, 2014; Lewis & Westlund, 2015).

However, the argument against assuming that publicly sharing data is fair-game for researchers is rather obvious. Firstly, there is no informed consent for the use of the data for research purposes. This is an issue that has been raised in a rather public manner after Kramer et al's (2014) paper was released in which they manipulated the Facebook feeds of 700,000 users without direct informed consent. This was widely criticised by researchers who highlighted that the lack of informed consent was troubling (see Grimmelmann, 2014). However, Kramer et al (2014) argue that they were covered by Facebook's end user agreement which allows them to change and access users' data. Though this is of course technically true, larger questions arise about the ethical treatment of participants who did not consent directly to having their content manipulated. Indeed, in terms of 'big data' collection, though the data is there and is public for anyone to read this of course does not automatically mean that researchers should use it without making people aware that their data is being taken and used for research purposes. Some argue that users should not only be provided with the option to opt-out of sharing data publicly, but, given the increasing rise in 'big data' not only for research but increasingly for advertising, that they should also be

able to explicitly opt-out of that data being used for purposes other than social interaction. Here we get into a discussion on 'cookies' which we will side-step for the purpose of this rather short discussion, but needless to say, informed consent on such a large scale is often impossible and impractical. boyd and Crawford sum up this notion, asking questions of a 'big data' approach towards the access of online information:

> *"should someone be included as a part of a large aggregate of data? What if someone's 'public' blog post is taken out of context and analyzed in a way that the author never imagined? What does it mean for someone to be spotlighted or to be analyzed without knowing it? Who is responsible for making certain that individuals and communities are not hurt by the research process? What does consent look like? It may be unreasonable to ask researchers to obtain consent from every person who posts a tweet, but it is unethical for researchers to justify their actions as ethical simply because the data is accessible. Just because content is publicly accessible doesn't mean that it was meant to be consumed by just anyone"* (boyd & Crawford, 2011, 11)

The above objection to the use of public data does hint at a larger issue; namely that researchers shouldn't assume that all 'publics' are equal. If a user shares something publicly they understandably may not feel that this alone means that it will be largely seen and accessed. It may be meant for a specific group of people; a 'specific public' (Dyer, 2016). Fandoms highlight in part this issue of a specific public. Though they are open to view publicly, the use of specific hashtags highlights their target audience to be particular members of an interest group, or people interested in certain events such as Eurovision (Highfield et al., 2013). In the same way, some of the participants of this study noted that they felt that not all 'publics' are equal. Some for example noted that being public on Twitter was less

problematic than being public on other platforms, as they felt the fast-moving nature of Twitter meant their data was soon forgotten and replaced with newer content. This echoes the concerns raised by Dwyer et al (2007) who noted that specific platforms fostered different attitudes towards what data was shared and how publicly it was shared. They noted that Facebook users expressed greater trust in the platform than MySpace users did in MySpace, and were therefore far more willing to share data publicly on Facebook that they were on MySpace. Similar results were found in this data, but importantly, not only was this a platform-to-platform issue, but largely varied from user-to-user in line with Comic Book Theory, with different users brining different extratextual and intertextual resources to the platforms to approach them in line with their individual needs.

There are also potential issues with the assumption that publicly shared data is public by choice. Public is for many people a default for participating in social media (boyd & Crawford, 2011). For example, studies have examined attitudes towards privacy settings on social media and have found a number of complex approaches towards what data is shared publicly (boyd & Hargittai, 2010). Research has shown that privacy settings are often sacrificed online in order to interact successfully and present identity successfully. For example, Young and Quan-Hasse (2009) note that students with public profiles have larger networks and interact with more people. Others have similarly noted variable levels of disconnect between the users' desires to protect their privacy and their desire to share data publicly that make the collection of public data questionable (Acquisti & Gross, 2006; Stutzman, 2006). As such, the awareness of the public-ness of data may not be consistent for all users, and it cannot be assumed that just because we can access the data that this data was intended for public use and consumption.

This bears out in the analysis of the data from this thesis, which notes that privacy is often negotiated between user and design, and that the boundaries of the performance are negotiated in this regard, with participants noticeably accepting trade-offs in the level of their privacy in order to participate in these spaces. The findings from this data reveal complicated relationships with public data. Participants appear to walk the line between a need to be public and a desire to control their data and image. Comic Book Theory suggests that the boundaries of this are negotiated in an individual manner, and the findings suggest that some participants felt they had to doctor their content whilst others merely noted they sacrifice privacy for 'better' social interactions on sites such as Twitter. They ideally want to act as a gatekeeper and keep their profiles locked and private, but in order to fully gain everything they can out of social media they suggest that their hand is forced; they need to be public. For the participants, the decision to opt-out of public interaction was not so much an opt-out of having their data read as it was opt-out of the full experience of social communication online. The participants talked about how they maintained control in some ways via blocking and reporting, but as they wanted to participate in the social sphere they felt they had no real way of maintaining control over 'lurking' and over researchers using their data without interacting with them. For the participants, to go private was also to severely limit social interaction and to limit people finding them. To go private was to lessen their social impact.

In order for public and private to be dichotomous they ought to be exclusive and exhaustive categories. But for participants in this research it was neither; it was a false dichotomy. that should not be upheld by researchers, or relied upon without due ethical consideration. Instead, public and private were viewed on a scale, with everyone in existence seeing the post at one end and nobody at the other. This scale also seems to inform the content, timbre, and wording of their posts as well; some things that they thought would have larger reach were worded differently. They discussed how posts for wider unknown audiences were, depending on the participant, more considered or tapered so as not to give too much

personal information, or so as to appeal to a larger-than-usual audience. Whereas posts to their more

'specific publics' and to smaller scale audiences could contain more personal information, stronger

opinions, and subjects tapered to the perception of that audience.

This is echoed in many ways by the spate of researchers who have struggled to gain access to otherwise

public websites in order to conduct research and who have noticed that styles of interaction have

changed once their presence as a researcher is announced. LeBesco (2004) discussed in her study of 'fat

positive' discussion groups how the participants felt spied upon by her 'lurking' without actively

engaging with them, and that her presence was generally better received when she added content and

discussion to the group. Similarly, Chen et al (2004) acknowledged that researcher might need to 'lurk'

at first on some sites to gain enough knowledge before participation, but that collecting data without

express permission and without announcing a presence on forums and listservs was simply not

acceptable. They state that "many list owners and newsgroup members deeply resent the presence of

researchers and journalists in their groups" (Chen et al. 2004, 159). When the researchers attempted to

gain access to these communities, they were often faced with adversity from users who on the whole

felt that, yes their conversations were public, but not by default for researchers or for the public writ

large.

There is no easy fix for this problem as it stands, and it becomes a trade-off for practicality. Informed

consent on the scale that much of 'big data' is conducted upon is largely impractical. However,

researchers using 'big data' perhaps should consider being more transparent and more sensitive to the

unclear divide between public and private. It is worth keeping in mind that, in many ways, the

indexability of data required by much of 'big data' strips away at this divide as well as potentially the

context and intent of the original message, boiling the complex interactions down into a cold and abstract set of statements. Here we begin to delve into the murky and decades old discussion over the merits of qualitative and quantitative methodology which often threatens to derail so many of these conversations and that again we will sidestep. Many 'big data' researchers continue to discuss and debate how to deal with and account for context in the data they analyse.

Rather than assuming that public interaction is a singular category, researchers should be careful to acknowledge the many nuances at play in public interactions. Public should not be thought of as a catch-all category, but instead researchers should acknowledge that there is, as Waskul and Douglass (1996) put it two decades ago, such a thing as being 'publicly private'. The interactions may be publicly accessible but the participants may view these interactions as less public, possibly even as private. The same may be true of archival data that seems to be more prevalent these days in 'big data' studies. The warning for 'big data' then seems to be summed up neatly in the words of Roberts, Smith, and Pollock (2004, 161), who state that "researchers do not have the right to define spaces as public or private to meet their own research needs. Rather, account should be taken of the size and nature of the online forum and the intrusiveness of the study". Similarly, this research suggests that the assumption of public and private should not be made with a consideration of what these mean to the participants, and how these boundaries have been reached on a person-by-person, platform-by-platform basis.

Essentially then, keeping this discussion very much in mind during the data collection process, this research did not collect public data from social media platforms directly. This is in part a practical matter. Given that this research did not focus upon one or two platforms, but instead sought to understand the participants' understanding of social media, and to discuss their use of a wide and broad

range of sites, it would be impractical and in some cases, impossible to access all of the social media

platforms that the participant was using. Some sites such as Yik Yak for example are anonymised and

location based. Other sites and platforms are similarly location bound, and can include sensitive

information despite being public, including data platforms such as Grindr and Tinder. In essence, this

would mean that I could not reasonably follow and observe the participant's journey and narrative

construction on these platforms in person as I may not be in the same geographical location, and I could

not reasonably know which posts the participant has sent and which have been sent by others. Similarly,

as I own an Android phone, some platforms that are Apple exclusive would not be easily accessed. As

such, and given the fact that my participants had a large range of platforms and sites between them,

reasonably observing and capturing data from these sites over the research period would have been

problematic and often impossible.

Similarly, observation was not deemed a tenable process as the participants did not access the

platforms for prolonged period, meaning any observation would not be naturalistic. Nonetheless during

the data collection process, using the augmented observation process of 'verbal protocols' (Young,

2013), this study did view the public profiles of the participants. Crucially however, this was very much

with the consent of the participants, who were in control of which data I saw during this process. They

were given the option of not showing me their public profiles, and it was emphasised that there would

be no repercussions if they did not want to show me the platforms. As such, the participants were in

control of what data I saw, and how I saw it. As this was a guided discussion and viewing of and about

their social media accounts, they were encouraged to take control of the protocols, guiding me through

their profiles to aspects of the site they found interesting or noteworthy. This process therefore allowed

me access to the public profiles of the participants, whilst affording them explicit consent and control

over what data I had access to with the direct knowledge that this data was being used for the purpose

of research upon which they had been fully briefed. Given this, the observations were instead changed to a 'guided tour' of their social media platforms and their interaction with technology.

This approach of direct agency and control for the participants over their own data, along with my access to said data with the express and overt aim of collection for research purposes, helped to provide protection for the participants, their data, and their privacy. This helps meet Corbin and Morse (2003) suggestion that interview research is to be "conducted with sensitivity and guided by ethics" (Corbin & Morse, 2003, 335). Here the sensitivity towards the participants' data and privacy is tantamount, and any compromise is not largely antithetical to the aims of the research. As such the awareness of the need to protect the data and rights to privacy of the participants becomes beneficial to both the researcher and the participants.

The approach taken in this research as such purposefully sidesteps this discussion of what data we should have access to, presenting a third tenable option. Rather than discussing the data produced by participants, this research positions the experiences and thoughts of the participants in regards to social media as being of key importance. In essence, the data produced is less important than the thoughts and machinations of the participants in the production and consumption of this data. This is especially pertinent as data production online and especially in social media has been suggested to be an a-typical usage (Barnes, 2013; Bright et al., 2014), in comparison to the consumption of data, which appears to be more common, and just as worthy of attention as produced posts and updates. Rather than collecting potentially a-typical uses of social media through online content and data alone, this research was able to unpack the uses of social media beyond purely data consumption to understand the role of social media in everyday life, and gave voice to the thoughts and perceptions of the users of social media.

Finally then, this thesis wishes to conclude by referring back to the words of Larkin, written in 2008, who noted that "what media are needs to be interrogated, not presumed" (Larkin, 2008:3). Comic Book Theory holds this to be true, especially in an age when they are increasingly present in the lives of young people. This interrogation is vital to understand the role of the platforms in the social interactions of young people. Through Comic Book Theory, this much needed interrogation can be conducted, in a manner that allows for the deftness needed in addressing the growing array of experiences online.

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Appendix

1) Transcribed participant interviews example

(.) = micro pause   (.*) – timed (longer) pause   [_____] = overlapping speech
>___< quicker speech   <____> slower speech (underlined word) = emphasis
(h) = laughter   ((***)) = unclear

Willow – Recording 1
I: Erm, so what social networking sites do you use? We'll start really generally.
P: Umm, Facebook, twitter, erm.. what else counts as a social media site?
I: What do you think counts [as a social media site?
P: Umm.. I don't know] (h). Erm, anything you interact with somebody socially I guess. Erm. (.) I'm on Reddit a lot. if you count being inactive on a forum (.) social.
I: I do personally, a lot of the participants are mentioning they read social media a lot more then they put stuff up
P: I do that, totally. I don't post anything on Reddit but I'm reading stuff a lot
I: Cool. (.) How often do you go on them?
P: Erm (.) Facebook I probably check maybe two or three times a day depending on the day of the week. Or sometimes on the weekend I won't check very often. Twitter (.) erm (.) Once a day? Maybe twice? Again depending on what I'm doing. Erm. Sometimes I don't check for a couple of days and then go back and catch up (.) Yep.
I: Erm, which devices – what about Tumblr as well?
P: Erm, I don't really use [Tumblr –
I: sorry, not Tumblr-]
P: Tumblr? I do occasionally go on Tumblr, but I don't have a Tumblr account [what were you going to say?
I: Ok] Err Reddit.
P: Reddit? Err (.)
I: How often do you use that?
P: Errr, erm. (.) I don't really use as much as browse it so, err? (.) {sigh} Maybe once or twice a day on some days, some days not at all?
I: This is a bit of a derailing but it's interesting and I think it's worth getting into. Why do you not consider that to be use of a social- do you not think that's how most people use social med[ia-?
P: Yeah, yeah, yeah] but because I don't actually participate so I wouldn't consider myself to be using it as social media. It's a social media site but I don't necessarily use it, I just kind of read it when I'm bored.
I: What about Facebook? Do you post a lot on Facebook?
P: Yeah, okay, yeah, I see where you're going with this. Yeah, no I don't do that either, but because I have an account that people can interact with in various ways I would consider that I would actually use that, whereas Reddit, as I said, I just browse it.
I: Sure. Do you consider that to be atypical use of say Facebook?
P: Yeah. Probably.
I: How come?
P: Well, it's hard to say cos you don't see anybody who doesn't use it do you? (h)
I: No, no that's very true.

P: Erm (h) but erm out of most people that I know (.) <a fair few of them> use Facebook a fair amount (.) they'll update statuses fairly often. There's a few people I know that use Facebook like I do (.) erm or with slightly more occasional use than I do but (.) generally (.) but I mean half of these people that are on my Facebook I only ever see only ever hear from through Facebook. So some of them could not be using it at all and I wouldn't know.

I: Which devices do you access these sites on?

P: Erm. (.) Twitter is almost exclusively through my phone.

I: Yep. Ditto.

P: And I don't use the twitter client so (.) erm check twitter from my (.) my computer only occasionally. Facebook mostly from my phone again but sometimes from my pc and Reddit is normally always from my pc, once or twice I have read on my phone but not very often.

I: Why did you make those particular choices? Why only twitter on your phone for example?

P: Erm. Just because it's something that I only tend to – it's something I tend to flick through when I'm on my way somewhere or I'm waiting for something or I'm half watching tv and I'm not on my computer or you know something like that. It's not something that when I'm at my computer I use my computer for actually gaming so I don't tend to use it a whole load for social media because normally when I'm at my pc I'm doing something. Occasionally I'll use it when I'm waiting for something else, like when I'm waiting for somebody (.) when I'm waiting for somebody to come play a game with me, or when I'm just a bit can't be bothered to do anything and I'm waiting to dinner or something or I'm gonna get up in minutes, but mostly because my mobile is always on me or normally always on me when- it's always on me when I'm out and it's quite often near-ish when I'm at home, so I normally check them when I'm out so it's my phone or when I'm waiting for things and I'm bored.

I: Okay. Umm. Do you not like the way twitter is on pc? Is it anything to do with the design or is it just the ease of-?

P: No it's just (.) It's erm (.) I think actually partly because my (.) I said I don't use the twitter client on my phone, I use erm a different app and it'll save where I leave off so I scroll up to most current, whereas on twitter on desktop, and this is me not having used it in a while, you normally start at the latest stuff and have to scroll down and I prefer scrolling up rather than scrolling down – dunno why, but it just I prefer – I think because otherwise I'm coming in on conversations and discussions that have like started before and I'm seeing the end of, so I prefer to scroll upwards <u>through</u> the conversations and follow the thread of things that are happening, rather than scrolling down and going what on earth is going on and then waiting to get the fiftieth tweet before I [understand what's happening

I: Yeah, so you're still having] that kind of real time feel but (.)

P: Yeah, just really delayed from whenever I decide I'm gonna check twitter (h)

I: Okay (h). Erm

P: And also because as I said I don't check it when I'm at home, I check it when I'm out, so.

I: Yeah. Wha- how do you use Facebook and twitter? What sort of things do you write about or?

P: I tend not to

I: How come?

P: Erm. Because I'm not very social so I don't really (.) it takes a lot for me to consider posting. I feel very erm. Can I pause a second?

I: Yeah, yeah.

P: Erm, yeah, sorry, where was I?

I: Err, yeah, what sort of things do you write about on Facebook?

P: Erm, yeah, so I tend not to really write about stuff, I don't really (.) feel the need to broadcast loads of stuff on Facebook all the time

I: Sure

P: Erm, and I don't really like doing it (.) erm, so I tend not to – I'll, I'll like write normal like happy birthdays to people, or occasionally I'll put up status erm like big events or something or I've erm. Or commenting on other people's stuff that people have tagged me on or whatever, but I tend not to (.) really post. I think my last tweet was in like. Err. I've had a twitter account for 4 years and I've sent (.) not over a hundred tweets? I think (h). So yeah, I tend not to (.)

I: You use it as more of a forum than a (.)

P: Yeah. I tend to use it to erm (.) not stalk other people but yeah stalk other people (h)

I: No, that's fine (h).

P: You know, to see what- yeah, see my last tweet was 295 days ago (h).

I: Yeah, okay. See, interestingly about this, my other participants have all said this is exactly how they use social media – stalking other people. Not so much updating. So I think, and I'm gonna shove this in my thesis, that it's not atypical, that most people think-

P: Yeah, but I would argue that a lot more of them (.) I mean (.)

I: Yeah, go on, you can use names I'll blank it.

P: Okay, that's fine. Okay, yeah, so, having some of your other participants on Facebook, I can tell you that they update a hell of a lot more than I do. So while I don't disagree that most people would consider themselves that that's a primary use of Facebook, stalking friends, I would still argue that me (.) not interacting a huge amount on Facebook or twitter is slightly more atypical than (.) than most. I mean, 295 days since your last tweet and god knows when my last Facebook update was. I think, when, when, about a month and a half ago and that was only because I was on holiday (h). So (.)

I: Erm. So what sort of people do you follow? What sort of people are on your social networking sites?

P: So Facebook is all friends, and family.

I: You mean offline friends? Have you met anyone online purely or is it {all people you have pre-established?

P: No. All the people I know on- erm (.) well (.) all people that I know apart from some of my family who I'm fairly certainly I've met but can't be 100% I've had to add them just in case (h).

I: {laugh} That's really interesting.

P: [laugh] Oh but no there is one girl that I have never ever met but we had a pen pal relationship from when I was about 14 and she is a family friend's granddaughter.

I: Okay.

P: So it's not like I've just random- none of them are just random people that I've never met before or I have no connection to, even if I haven't, even the few that I haven't, probably haven't met and even the few that I maybe haven't met will because they're related or-

I: So there's still some offline tie there?

P: Yeah. Yeah. There's nobody that I purely met, I think, on my Facebook.

I: What sort of people are on twitter? (h)

P: So, twitter is, I have a few friends (.) Very little family? I think I have my boyfriend (h) and my sister. Erm. Very little family. A few friends. Erm. Mostly, follow various often pseudo-celebrities. Yeah.

I: (h) Do you notice any differences between the sites?

P: Well, yeah. Duh. One's Facebook and one's twitter. Erm, sorry (h).

I: No no no that's fine, I'll quote that. That's good, I like it. I might even make that a chapter title (h).

P: {laugh} (.5) Facebook erm (.) tends to be a whole bunch of like random crap and adverts (.) erm and random people's breakfasts and erm (.) and erm (.) selfies and (.) and (.) and people selling things and erm um generally complaining about how shit their lives are or (.) how amazing everything is. Erm. Yeah. Err. And there's a lot more (.) well, there isn't a lot more media on Facebook, actually, that's not true. There's more obvious media on Facebook, so there's a lot of games that people are playing, and lots of quizzes that people are doing, and when people link things from other sites, because they're sharing

things, you've got, um, it's more obviously media. Whereas on twitter, um, links and things are just links, they're not actual embedded pictures or bits of text or what have you.

I: Do people share links more on Facebook, you'd say, link to other sites?

P: I wouldn't necessarily say more, but I think it's more obvious when they're doing it on Facebook than when it's twitter, because on twitter as I said you know it's a link so you're not really (.) like looking at it. So if someone shares a link on twitter and the tweets not something I'm particularly interested in I won't click on it (.) if someone shares a share on Facebook I'll still have a general idea of what the thing they were sharing was, because there'll be a little picture and a little bit of blurb and sometimes if I'm really bored I'll just click on it to see what the hell it's about, because it's not just a web link, it's not just, it's got a tag line and a photo and a bit of text underneath, it's not just a web link, a site address, so. I'm more likely to click on it. People share a lot more news articles and I've got, I follow, cos I follow a fair amount of news sites as well, not just news sites but like various websites that put up, not news articles but articles on particular things, that, you know they've got auto tweets so whenever they put a post it links to something, so that would all be (.) sharing media and stuff, and I've forgotten what the question you were asking was.

I: The differences between Facebook and twitter, and here's something you said that links to a paper I just read that I think might be on to something and I want to explore a bit more, so if you've got any thoughts go for it. You said that people whinge a lot on Facebook.

P: Yeah they do.

I: They, this paper, agree that people whinge a lot on Facebook and on twitter do the exact opposite and talk about how great they are, or how great their life is. They talk about good things on twitter, and whinge more on Facebook. Have you noticed that, or?

P: (.) I get a lot of opinion on twitter and a lot of whinging on Facebook, and I think that's possibly because of the people I followed. If I followed all the same people on Facebook as I did on twitter I'd be able to tell you, but because I follow vastly different people for different reasons, a lot of people on twitter tend to be, like, for example with the Ferguson thing that's just happened, my twitter feed was full of people tweeting about Ferguson, whereas on Facebook there was absolutely nothing, it was still people whinging about their normal lives. There was just nothing on Facebook apart from, st- yeah. There was barely anything. So (.) and the people I follow on twitter being celebrities of a varying degree, are often hawking something, whether, you know, in a vulgar manner or err oh my god I've just done a really cool thing that I love or they're re-tweeting people that like the stuff they've done or etc etc etc, so yeah it's a bit more positive on twitter in a way, but I wouldn't be able to say without following the same people.

I: Okay.

P: The few people that I do follow on Facebook and twitter tend to cross-post.

I: Yeah. Would you ever cross-post?

P: No, because I don't post. And, no, I wouldn't do, because they're different (.5) they're for different things. Facebook is heavily vetted by the people- the fact that I have a bunch of family on there which is why I very rarely share anything a) personal, because there's also a bunch of acquaintances that I had when I was like 13 and I don't really want people that I have seen in, how old am I, 12 years, that took a moment (h), 12 years thinking, you know, knowing, the things that people I see every couple of days know about me, because I don't really feel like that's a level of intimacy needed, erm, and I know you can set different settings so that only some people see your Facebook stuff and other people don't, but that's just too much hassle and I can't be arsed. Um. And I don't really care that much. And twitter, because it's less family and less random people that I haven't seen in 12 years, it's more opinionated. Facebook seems, tends to be like oh look I'm doing, I'm in another country, or yay I managed to do this, or something. Actually I whinge more on twitter than I do Facebook. I use twitter [{inaudible}

I: Intriguing. Yeah, I've al-{inaudible}]] Yeah. It disappears.

P: My stuff on twitter is actually more personal. But that's probably because my profile is locked and there are only (.) ten people following me? Probably? I don't know because I don't check. I don't really care. Um. Okay, 15. And all of them (.) One is Edward James Olmos.

I: He's following you?

P: Yeah! Are you not following Edward James Olmos on twitter? He follows everybody back.

I: What a sweetie.

I: (.) Do you notice any differences with different devices? Here's something that we can go into as well, um, we're gonna weave into this question. You just got a new phone, ish

P: Yeah

I: We'll talk about that in a sec, but do you notice any differences between devices?

P: No, because they're both android devices.

I: No, no, say like between your computer and your phone, do the devices

P: Between devices? Well, yeah, because, um (.)

I: Do they affect how you use and think about the sites?

P: Yeah I'm always paranoid when I'm on a touch phone that I'm gonna accidentally like something really crap on Facebook

I: {laugh}}

P: that's always a paranoid moment, when you half fumble your phone and think shit what have I just pressed. Err, and twitter is vastly different because I use the official twitter site on my pc, I don't use tweet deck or something like that, because I don't go on it often so there's no real point setting up that on my pc whereas on my phone see I use a custom app which looks very different from the twitter app, as far as I remember from the twitter app before, um, which I had quite a long time ago.

I: I've recently just re-downloaded it.

P: Have you?

I: Yeah it got better, yeah.

P: Uh, well, yeah, anyway, but I'm happy with the one I've got now so I don't really see a need to switch back to it. Um.

I: Err, so, did your new phone and your old phone, did your old phone, are you using the sites differently now that you've got a new slightly different better phone? Does it affect you use any of the sites?

P: Sort of, but not really, because of the new phone. Because of um (.) when I got the new phone and I was choosing things to re-install, apps to install and how to set up my phone I decided that I actually wanted to be checking things a little bit less, which is why my checking of twitter has dropped off lately, because I've moved them off my homepage and into a folder, a social folder, on another page. Um. Which funnily enough includes feedly, even though it's not social, but, eh, it all bungs under there under my way of getting news, um, I've got something else there as well that's not, um. Yeah. Oh, messenger. Yeah. Oddly, skype's not in the social folder.

I: Yeah, that is odd.

P: It's cos it's a phone app, really, not a social.

I: So, yeah, so there's your- so you made a conscious decision-

P: I was trying not to use Facebook and twitter as much, so I use them less now I'm on my HTC than I was on my Samsung, but to be honest (.) there's basically no difference because they're both android phones.

I: Okay, so not much difference in how you use them or how you think about the sites.

P: No. No, it did annoy me when I first got the HTC because for some reason there was an older version of Facebook than the one that I had on my Samsung, which I'd only updated very recently because I'd been refusing to update Facebook for quite a while, so that annoyed me (.) but other than that. It was just that it was linking- whenever you clicked on the link it would take you to your um web app rather than opening in Facebook and that really annoyed me.

I: What made you start using Facebook and twitter?

P: Umm. Facebook? I joined Facebook when pretty much everybody migrated off Myspace.

I: {laugh} Old!

P: {laugh} Which makes me ruddy old (h)! Yeah. Um, and it was one of those things that we resisted for a while but then nobody was using Myspace anymore and then I dunno who convinced me to get a Facebook account but somebody convinced me to get a Facebook account. And twitter I actually resisted joined for quite a long time. As I said I only joined it 4 years ago and (.) I think it was actually weirdly a bunch of um web comic characters who were tweeting – I mean, there were also a bunch of other people I followed at the same time, but I think that that was the main one was that the storyline going on they were tweeting stuff that was happening in the web comic and so I was, I decided fuck it I'll just follow them cos I'll set up a twitter account and follow them and then I can you know get more of the content.

I: What do you like about Facebook and twitter, and what don't you like about them?

P: Um, I actually don't like very much about Facebook and I do often bounce around going why do I still have this one there? Um.

I: Anything specific?

P: I think I just hate everybody on it. Not everybody (h)! Not everybody, that's a bit of an exaggeration. But about 90% of the people on it, and 90% of the shit I see on it. And also all the random crappy opinions that I have to put up with which make me really really fucking mad, that I really hate. Twitter not so much because again I have curated who I'm on, so they tend to people who have fairly similar viewpoints to me, um, politically, so I tend not to sort of have to put up with the same level of crap. Also because, you have no personal affiliation with them, it doesn't bother me as much if they hold an opinion I don't care about because, yeah, I don't really know them so it doesn't bother me. Um. Something else I was gonna say about Facebook as well, I've forgotten now.

I: I like the curated audience versus the imposed audience, that's nice.

P: You feel like you've gotta add people on Facebook that you know, because otherwise it's insulting apparently.

I: Yeah, I have this a lot. What else don't you like about Facebook?

P: Err, Facebook, Facebook, um, um, people's shitty opinions, people's shitty crap, people's banal crap, um (.) I also don't like the way it kinda feels like, like you are stalking people if you show a passing interest in somebody's life that you haven't heard about for 3 or 4 years and you want to figure out what the fuck's going on, cos people always refer to things in the most oblique way so you're like what the shit is this about? And then you have to go into their profile and look and then you feel vaguely guilty for doing that, like you're somehow invading their privacy even though they've put everything out there for everyone to see anyway, so you're not really (.) but I think it's the doing it all that once that's a bit weird. But anyway. Um. Um. Yeah, so I just don't really care about Facebook, but I feel like I just have some inane need to kinda keep checking it every day, just in case there's something I care about? I guess there's 2 or 3 people whose status updates I kinda do, but even then they're the people that I see a lot. Maybe there's like 3 or 4 people maybe that I don't see very often that put stuff on Facebook that I vaguely care about?

I: Yeah. Yeah that's not uncommon.

P: Um, but the nice thing about Facebook is that it's easy to share with people (.) with family and people you (.) so like when I was on holiday it was nice to be able show people where I was and that I was still safe without actually having to check in with them personally every 10 seconds or every day, and that oh we are still alive and we are having fun so it was nice to just to be able to stick something on Facebook in a nice kinda general manner.

I: So that's one thing you do like. Anything else you do like Facebook?

P: Erm. I really like the messaging system. Not the current iteration of the messaging system that they have at the moment cos it fucking irritates me when you click on a message and it's just that tiny little box, tiny tiny tiny tiny tiny little box, and I've got really bad eyesight, so it's really fucking hard to see.

I: How about (.) how about messenger on the phone?

P: I actually prefer messenger on the phone. But, it pisses me off that it's a separate app. I really resisted getting it for quite a while because it really pissed me off that they made it a separate app, because it takes up more space, it's really fucking irritating, <u>but</u> since Facebook did that and then made the stupid little box in the corner I actually prefer sending stuff from my phone than sending it from my Facebook, cos they make go through three extra steps to get it full screen on my bloody laptop. So, yeah. Although it is easier to type. But actually, messenger is probably the thing that I use Facebook the most for, although not so much anymore, because the people that I used to constantly chat on messenger with we all seem to have got stupidly busy lives and don't have time now. But yeah. Also, sometimes I use it as an alternative to a text messaging system with my boyfriend because I can't be bothered. Or because I'm at work, pretending I'm not on Facebook. Or I am actually working. Or sending links, or whatever. It's an easy way to send links.

I: Okiedokes.

P: I didn't actually answer, you didn't actually ask, I didn't answer anything about twitter.

I: Oh, well, what do and don't you like about twitter? Let's do that then yeah.

P: Erm, erm. It's all really small on twitter. It's really close together. So sometimes you can kinda just be flicking through and you're kinda just glazing over everything cos it's all really small.

I: Is that on phone or on pc or?

P: Bit of both. As I said, I've got bad eyesight (h). Erm. Err, it's hard to say without say without giving you my niggles on my custom twitter app rather than on twitter itself.

I: Yeah, that's fine, it'd be useful to know.

P: Erm. Erm. Well searching for people on my phone is a fucking pain, but erm. Err. What don't I like about twitter? There's not really much I don't like about twitter cos I can kinda just ignore them, I feel like I can ignore it for weeks at a time, whereas I don't feel like that I can do that with Facebook. So twitter doesn't bother me so much. Erm. Mostly because I can just, as I said because I don't know the people on twitter I can kinda just ignore it, so it doesn't end up annoying me as much. Erm. I mean the reason that I originally got Carbon, which is the twitter app, cos I'm gonna stop referring to it as the twitter app as there's too many words for me, the reason I initially got Carbon, I don't know how true this anymore cos I haven't used the twitter app in forever, was because the twitter app, when I did have it, you couldn't, it wouldn't embed pictures in the text so you would have to click on the little picture link and then it would come up and half the time it didn't work and it would just hang and it would go we can't load this picture, so you'd never actually get to see stuff, so that's why I got the new client, the new app.

I: So it changed how you use it.

P: Yeah, and because I can also open links and things within the app itself, without having to load up a web page and then go back, and it's just much simpler. So. I don't tend to have many niggles with twitter, possibly because I don't use the official twitter app. When I was using the official twitter app there were things that really fucking annoyed me, but because I managed to pick a good app for it, one that I get on with and does what I want, it doesn't bother me so much.

I: Erm. Do you (.) have you thought about using any other social networking sites? Or do twitter and Facebook do everything that you need them to?

P: I resisted getting the two of them in the first place – it was only because I felt immense pressure from various other people because I finally gave in, that I actually got them in the first place, so unless Facebook gets outdated by something else, or twitter does, that I probably wouldn't be bothered. Two is

enough and I barely use them anyway, so. I use twitter a bit like a news site anyway, so I don't really feel the need to use anything else.

I: They do everything you need to?

P: Yeah.

I: No vine, no Instagram, no?

P: No. I don't really, I don't, Instagram is a bunch of, erm. (aside)

I: Erm, so what were we talking about? Yeah, so, Facebook and twitter do everything you want them to.

P: Yeah. Yeah.

I: Erm yeah any other websites, is what I've been saying, no twitter, no vine, no-

P: No, I use twitter.

I: Sorry, no vine, no Instagram.

P: No (.) vine is full of (.) every vine I've seen has just been shit. (.)

I: No snapchat? That's where all the kids are going.

P: I, I don't, I don't converse with people enough and I don't give a shit. And my memory is really bad, so I'd rather not have stuff delete every 10 seconds, because I wouldn't know what the fuck was going on. And if I wanna converse with somebody social I tend to just fucking talk to them, I don't really tend to, well I occasionally catch up over messenger, but those are big long textboxes rather than a picture with a penis drawn on them. No, I just don't care. I'm not a teenager so I don't give a shit. I don't converse with that many people. And Instagram is just pictures.

I: How much thought do you give to the way you present yourself online? Is this something you think about a lot?

P: Yeah. Yeah, I tend to be quite careful. Um.

I: In what way?

P: Well, a) both my profiles are locked, and I am quite careful about like my privacy settings. So there are some things that only certain people can see, so although I said earlier that I wouldn't go to the effort of making sure that some of my posts were only for certain people because I can't be bothered to set up lists, I am careful to make sure that some stuff is only viewable by close friends or family, or however, I can't remember how you fucking do it, but there are some people, there are various levels of settings, so, but yeah.

I: So you think about your identity a lot.

P: Yeah, I'm quite careful (.) I mean I don't really present much of an identity online in terms of posting and stuff. I am quite careful to pick what photos I put up, what photos I use as my profile picture, like, things like that. Not so much on twitter.

I: Do you have the same profile picture – why not so much on twitter?

P: Because there's only really a tiny little profile box on twitter. It did take me quite a while to do my little twitter bio, it was empty for a very long time. Umm. It took me quite a while. It's not something I think about so much on twitter, because I tend to use it like it's almost a news site, so I don't really think about my end of it or what I'm presenting a lot. I sort of set it up and then I've just kind of left it alone, whereas on Facebook I'm quite careful about how I choose to present myself and describe myself.

I: Erm. Just on the back of that, before we move on, let's do a quick film script analysis which is useful and I've done it with everyone else. If someone was going to make a film script based purely on your Facebook profile

P: It'd be a really boring film.

I: Yeah, how come?

P: Because I don't (h) there's very little up there.

I: What sort of character would you be? What sort of film would it be?

P: (.) It'd either be, some like bizarre Mel Brooks-esq traipse through me wearing a pink hat at Disneyland and quoting Baldur's Gate stuff while running about like a maniac, or it would be one of

those weird arthouse films that, where you kinda just see a woman sitting in a corner for like 5 hours? Not doing anything?

I: I like that.

P: It'd be one of those. Either one of those, I think. Maybe. Or it'd be one of those things that just kinda just doesn't go anywhere for like an hour and half and you kinda leave going well, that was a bit of a waste of twenty quid wasn't it? Umm nothing really happened but I got to see a picture of a cat? (h) I guess! (.) Not what you were expecting?

I: No, I like that. I'm gonna use that. What about your twitter? What sort of film and what sort of character?

P: Well, it would definitely be a geeky character on, on twitter. I dunno what I'd be doing

I: But that'd be a lot more well defined character?

P: Yeah, yeah, it probably wouldn't be a woman sitting in a corner for 5 hours. Yeah, it'd probably be geeky, comic book reading, video game playing, um.

I: Attack of the Nerds sort of thing.

P: Yeah, eh, yeah, kind of, I feel like a Knights of Badassdom style thing might go down quite well. That kind of thing.

I: Yeah. Weirdly, that almost suggests you've got a much more cored centred identity on twitter, because you follow the sorts of things you like, like geeky, video games, whereas on Facebook it's a bit more general?

P: Probably because I'm trying to be vaguely quiet on Facebook and I'm trying not to be anything, really? I'm just trying [to be, trying to be

I: Not one thing]

P: Yeah, I'm not to be like, overly anything, on Facebook, I'm just trying to be a bit calmer, normal seeming? Whereas on twitter I don't really give a shit so it's all geeky stuff and yeah. Video games.

I: How in control of your identity do you feel? Do you ever feel like the websites stop you doing something, or restrict you or, the technology?

P: I actually feel like they force me to fill stuff out whereas I'd rather not.

I: Both of them?

P: Both of them, yeah. Like I said, my twitter bio was empty for ages and I eventually felt like I had to put something there, even though I don't really feel like I wanted to put something there. Um. And Facebook it does feel like you have to fill shit out, cos it otherwise it goes why haven't you filled out and you haven't done this and you haven't updated it like six months (.) the site just constantly pressures you to do it. Update your Facebook profile! Every time I go on Facebook it has that little tiny thing update your Facebook profile. Um. You've got 14 steps to go through! No matter how many times I skip through them it's like do them again! I don't wanna fucking do them again.

I: We want more info out of you for our advertising.

P: Yeah, that's the other problem, I don't really wanna give them too much advertising shit.

I: You downloaded messenger.

P: Yeah, I know, don't get me started. I refused to update Facebook for six months because it wanted permission to do things to my phone that I was not particularly happy with.

I: So you don't feel like you're hella out of control of your identity, but at the same time you feel like it's forcing you into a certain portrayal of identity that you're not necessarily, you wouldn't necessarily use? Is that pretty much it?

P: Err, yeah? I wouldn't put those sort of things up unless I had to. Facebook in particular, I mean twitter does it with it's ridiculous do it in 140 characters or however the fucking many it is. Umm yeah, do it in this tiny tiny amount of characters which feels quite limiting, cos then you're like, how do I sum myself up in 160 whatever characters without being really narcissistic or self-indulgent (.)

I: Whilst at the same time being witty.

P: Yes, yeah you have to be witty on those damn things.

I: So much pressure.

P: Yeah, you can't just put like I like books. And on Facebook it's like tell me everywhere you've been, tell me everything you've done, because I'm totally going to use for good purposes because your friends all want to know, not, not that we want to know, we couldn't care less where you went to school and how old you are and when you graduated and actually when did you last go to that shop? But your friends need to know. Your friends really need to know when the last time you went to Sainsbury's was.

I: Tell us every film you've ever watched!

P: Yeah, exactly. What film do you love? What is your favourite film? What book are you reading right now?

I: What's your bank account number?

P: Where do you live? Where are you going on holiday? Where have you been on holiday? How did you get there?

I: What's your cat's first name?

P: What's your cat's third name? (.) How are these people related to you? Yeah, no, Facebook is very like tell me everything about you now, so that we can hold it on file, so it does feel a bit like it's forcing you to do stuff so it can sell you stuff, or use you to sell things, um.

I: Okay, we're good, we're done here.

2) Axial Coding outline

Open Codes	Axial Codes	Themes
• Uses multiple devices, notices little discernible difference • Sharing photos is easier on the phone • Use of a wider range of platforms since gaining a mobile phone • No noticeable difference between Android and Apple • Noticeable difference between Android and Apple • Instagram is easier to use with a decent camera • Would stop using Instagram and Twitter without a smartphone • Feels more connected since getting smartphone, now carries charger • Android considerably easier than Apple. • Touchscreens are unwieldy • Emojis are simpler, they are smartphone exclusive • No difference between iPhone and iPad • Upgrading to 'smartphone' increased usage	Technology affecting user experience and engagement with the platform	Technology
• Prefers tablet as the apps are more streamlined • Android phones allow more flexibility with the way the platform is presented • Apple presents little ability to alter layout of platform • Little difference between multiple devices and platform presentation • Large difference between devices and platform presentation • Certain apps are intended to be used only on certain devices • Buttons are easier to use on a touchscreen • Social media apps are rubbish on tablets. Clunky and hard to manage. • Apps are ported to tablets, making them often hard to use on the larger devices • No Facebook on phone due to overbearing permissions and restrictions • Facebook app is counter-intuative and hard to use • Won't use Twitter client, and as a result, won't use Twitter on PC • Facebook on PC requires extra steps to post content as is less user-friendly than the app • Twitter less used on computer sue to boot-up time • Scrolling with thumb is quicker • Iphone more like computer. Android unique and easier	Technology affecting the layout and presentation of the platform	
• Phone is used for image sharing heavily • Effort to find and turn on laptop. Phone is more convenient. • Mainly uses mobile despite multiple devices • Would never use Twitter from a computer, mobile only. • Conversely, tries to mainly use Facebook on a computer • LinkedIn bad on phones • Computers are used for posting. "I just feel like I want to	Use of technology for specific purposes	

take my time with my Facebook" • Sitting and typing feels "more intentional" • Posting tweets on mobile only as it is short and easy • You don't need a mouse or dedicated keyboard for Twitter • Laptop is for work only • Moving app location on phone affects how much it is used • Phone not used around boyfriend or at home • PC for Reddit • Data usage limits on phone affects how they use social media • PC is reserved for gaming • PC for homework, shared computer • Gaining a smartphone gives a degree of agency and freedom • PC for sharing links is easier • PC for long posts • Keyboard on phone is awkward		
• Uses multiple platforms • Defining social media broadly • Snapchat is social despite being private • Facebook is different to other social media platforms • Facebook is unique • Facebook is generic compared to Twitter and Instagram • Dichotomy between commercial and social media, but some crossover. • Facebook and Twitter are 'overtly social', but wide range of platforms that are nonetheless social in some way • "I think there's such a social element to a lot of websites". • Milking sites as opposed to actively engaging • Facebook feels more overtly community based • Forums • Comment sections • Anonymous comment sections, still have community • Private messaging • Gaming community on gaming platforms	Beyond Facebook and Twitter	Social experiences online
• Anonymity is not usual online • Communication with friends on Facebook, and celebrities elsewhere. • Instagram serves as a 'stream of conciousness' • Images are considered for their appropriateness for each platform. • Platforms are kept separate for different social purposes • The same image can serve different social functions on different platforms. • Different platforms have different 'film scripts'. They express different aspects of identity • Different levels of engagement across different platforms • Twitter for breaking news, big events, and spying • Facebook for witty comments and socialisation • Work Twitter and public Twitter, to keep separate elements *within* the same platform • Facebook is strictly friends only.	A range of social experiences across a range of platforms	

• Twitter content is funny, short, and witty • Same user, multiple Facebook accounts • Wouldn't share cross-platform • Would only contact strangers on Twitter • Divide between 'friend' and 'follower'. • Linkedin friends kept separate to Facebook/ divide between professional and personal • Facebook presents a unique social experience based around community • Multiple platforms allow for dedicated exploration of aspects of identity • Allows a levelling between celebrities and non-celebrities' • Instagram is behind-the-scenes of celebrities • Twitter has more 'fads' – Ice bucket challenge etc • Slow and fast – Twitter is a fast in the moment engagement. Tumblr is slower and about a continual engagement with likes • No one platform represents all aspects of identity. Allows broader engagement. • Same content can serve different purposes on different platforms • Some communities, like forums, are more niche and dedicated to a particular topic	
• Writes posts to get reaction from considered audience • Worry over future bosses viewing content • Can 'let hair down' with more defined audience • Work/life balance is hard to maintain • Parents use Facebook. They don't use Twitter • Facebook allows for control over who sees posts • Twitter's wider audience means certain topics aren't engaged with or mentioned due to fear of how they will be interpreted. • Different audiences, such as work colleagues, are kept separate • Different work colleagues have their own personally-agreed methods for negotiating wide audiences • Older generation influx • "there's degrees of friends" • Older generations comfortable on Facebook in particular • Friends don't post parties on Facebook in case their dad sees it • Facebook is now old, friends have been accrued from many years and situations.	Context collapse – audience overlap
• Frequent usage, mainly browsing • Browsing forms main usage • Using social media for social knowledge • Using social media as news source • Facebook encourages engagement, other platforms encourage browsing • Private messaging "is now vastly overtaking even text messaging or certainly phone calls".	Uses beyond content production

• Adverts on Facebook • Event organisation on Facebook • Facebook as a calendar – events and birthdays • Social media as an email system • Need to be on social media to not miss out on peer socialisation • Following live commentary and reactions to major events • Watching videos • Studying and sharing school documents • Sharing updates is unusual occurrence • TV news • Re-blogging and sharing the content of other users • Gaming • Group conversations • Finding latest trends • Finding travel news • Hate-browsing • Following companies • Upvoting and downvoting • Liking posts • Posting is a minimal use – browsing is several times a day		
• Hashtags • Allowing moderation on Reddit changes engagement • Groups on Facebook • Trends on Twitter • Trends on Facebook are bad • Snapchat privacy • Contiguous comments on Facebook • Continual engagement with images and posts when they are commented/liked on Facebook encourages ongoing discussion • Linkedin is not built towards expressing identity • Facebook is more interactive and encourages ongoing engagement, whereas Instagram and Facebook encourage browsing and viewing. • Facebook's homogenous design (lack of ability to customise) leads to slight lack of control over identity presentation • Character limitation on Twitter restricts the identity performance noticeably • Character limitation means interactions lack nuance and context. Means certain topics are not engaged with. • Instagram does not need justification; it serves as a stream of consciousness without commentary • More care taken over profile images on different platforms • Design affordance for profile image used differently in different contexts • Twitter has less permanence • Facebook allows for more nuance in audience. With Twitter, it's a private/public dichotomy. • Wouldn't share image to Twitter as it may not get seen • Hashtags mean that you might reach a wider audience,	Range of design features across a range of platforms, and their effect upon user experience and identity performances	Comic Book Theory – Enmeshing user and design

meaning you have to be careful what you say • Google plus design is confusing and unclear. Not sure who can see what • Twitter 'about me' section restrictive. More meaningful as a result		
• IFTT • Dedicated Twitter platforms – Tweetdeck • Dedicated tumblr design for reblogging • Won't use Twitter client, and as a result, won't use Twitter on PC • Twitter Client allows for different style of reading, and other changes to the way twitter is used, including multiple streams • Timehop shows past experiences	Use of third party applications	
• Engagement tends to be within established friendship groups • Context affects and informs how they view other posts. • University course affects engagement • Not being near family means more engagement with new platforms • Three best friends on Tumblr who know the user and thus have greater extratextual information to unpack the identity performance • Starting university brings a new context that changes engagement with social media • Feel control over audience closure is easier on Facebook as audience is more defined • Extratextuality can inform about inside jokes • LGBT influences and issues affecting identity • Mental health influences • Different identity negotiation for different people based on their profession • Work affects use of the platforms – new concerns since starting work • Anonymity can lead to some people sharing more about themselves without fear out contextual clues revealing identity. • Don't have anyone from work on Facebook	Extratextual and intertextual influences	
• Facebook's safety features can be used to gain some control • Facebook contains a wealth of information, which changes how he considers interacting. • Privacy settings and control over audience lead to less concern and care over content • More awareness of exact audience leads to more careful consideration – less politics • Backstage consideration over the content posted on each platform • Feelings of control over identity and ability to be honest on Facebook due to ability to choose audience on a post-by-post basis • Feelings of less control over identity on Facebook • Lack of control on Twitter due to much wider audience,	Boundary negotiation	

larger public.		

- Instagram creates a continual identity performance over several posts
- Instagram has a lack of context, so user's interpretation of you can be less in your control due to their unpredictable closure
- Different profile pictures on different platforms
- Twitter's wider audience means certain topics aren't engaged with or mentioned due to fear of how they will be interpreted.
- More aware of audience on Twitter
- Despite availability of privacy feature on Twitter, these are not utilised as "I've always thought of it as being sort of completely public".
- Facebook can be both a private and public space
- Facebook is safer
- "I wouldn't dare put my opinions on Twitter, because you can't restrict it"
- Editing privacy settings so as not to worry about content
- Worrying about content and privacy
- "If you want to get everything out of Twitter you have to accept that it's going to have to be public. You just have to restrict what you say. You play the game and change what you say".
- Can doctor content on Facebook to make sure they reach similar minded friends
- Less identity consideration on Facebook compared to more professional platforms.
- Audience control on Facebook leads to multiple versions of self presented
- Groups are a way of controlling identity on Facebook and segmenting aspects of identity
- Anonymity can lead to some people sharing more about themselves without fear out contextual clues revealing identity.
- The larger audience on Twitter makes her feel she is shouting into a crowd, is more freeing. Facebook in comparison is stressful as she knows audience.
- Turns down unknown friend requests
- Some people lack self-control
- Editing content rather than using privacy settings
- Deleting friends as a form of control
- Feels like design doesn't hamper her, extratextual issues do instead. ("it's just me that stops me putting anything up")
- Feels like both Facebook and Twitter ask for too much info.
- Doesn't feel in control of her identity. Feels forced to reveal certain information
- Won't use privacy features as they are too complicated, so doctors content instead