Narcissism and Social Media: What are the drivers of online micro celebrity?

MS3307 New Media Thesis
U1146709

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ABSTRACT

Although the link between micro celebrity and narcissism is not entirely new, social media allows people to draw attention to themselves like never before by the commoditisation of the individual who is competing for attention over the Internet. Anyone can become a micro-celebrity however, unlike a mass media celebrity; micro-celebrity does not necessarily reward those who work hard to grab attention even though it still affords the negativities of celebrity. Indeed, there is an aspect to the attention economy which involves free labour to a degree that we could question why people participate in this drive for fame? Our research projects hopes to analysis the reasons why we all seem to be captivated by this social media invention. We intend to consider existing literature on narcissism, social anxiety, need for popularity and micro celebrity to explore the associations between them. By conducting interviews and observations on a group of participants we hope to explore the way they engage social media networks (SMNs) and establish patterns of behaviour. Looking closely at the specific interactions people do when connected to these SMNs, whether it be responding, messaging or lurking and also look at the types of pictures they post. By looking at the types of activities our participants do, we will particularly interested in finding parallels between our results and existing literature.

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INTRODUCTION

In a time when society rarely looks up from their phone or tablet, engrossed and engaged in the applications, posting pictures and exposing their every move and activity undertaken for the day. Our research projects hopes to analysis the reasons why we all seem to be captivated by this social media invention. We intend to consider existing literature on narcissism, social anxiety, need for popularity and micro celebrity to explore the associations between them. By conducting interviews and observations on a group of participants we hope to explore the way they engage social media networks (SMNs) and establish patterns of behaviour. Looking closely at the specific interactions people do when connected to these SMNs, whether it be responding, messaging or lurking and also look at the types of pictures they post. By looking at the types of activities our participants do, we will particularly interested in finding parallels between our results and existing literature.

Social media is designed to allow us to come together and find unity, but instead it appears to be making us strive for individualism, the desire to stand out from the crowd and to be recognised as unique and special. One of the aims of this thesis is to explore the motivations to expose our daily lives and intimate thoughts are now laid bare for the world to see. Do we engage in these practices because we all aim to achieve celebrity and fame? The rapid increase of these platforms that enable us to share our special moments are consumer driven but what drives the consumer?

Social media networks (SMNs) have continue to absorb large amounts of our free time since their inception in the early 2000s. We seem to have an unrelenting quest for knowledge about the lives, loves and failures of our peers. The World Wide Web has empowered any one with minimal knowledge of the Internet to be able to relay information to a potentially vast audience through personal blogging, videos, and photos via SMNs. Managing our online identity is something we have begun, as a society to

develop in to a craft. This current fascination with how we are perceived online or more specifically micro celebrity has reached a fever pitch.

So what is micro celebrity? As described by Terry Senft (2008) it is *"a new style of online performance that involves people 'amping-up' their popularity over the web using technologies like video, blogs and social networking sites"*. For micro celebrity, the self is a persona of tailored content presented to their perceived audience to grab the attention of their potential fans. (Marwick and Boyd, 2011, Marwick, 2010). The expression 'micro celebrity' is relatively new with few academic references to it and the majority of discussions are more often found in informal articles and blogs. It is someone who gains a cult or mainstream following due to viral Internet distribution. The term micro celebrity is deemed exclusive to the practice of fame achieved online. The term maybe new, but the concept is not; televisions, newspapers and magazines (now referred to as 'old media' or 'traditional mass media') recognised and engaged peoples drive to gain celebrity status or the '15 minutes of fame'. Participation on TV game shows, reality programmes and news media enabled individuals to contacting a newspaper with sensational stories to shine a light on oneself with details of sordid affairs with high profile people. These types of activities can be traced back to the beginnings of media; a long time before the emergence of what we now refer to as new media. Ironically, as pointed out by José Van Dijck (2009) in his article 'Users like you?' *"Online fame only counts as fame after it is picked up by traditional mass media – television, movies, and newspapers"* (p53).

In an article looking at celebrity as a new kind of status system, Murray Milner Jr (2010) writes:

"Famous people" include Elvis Presley and John F. Kennedy, John Lennon and Albert Einstein. In popular contemporary usage "Celebrity" is a subcategory of famous people, referring mainly to entertainers and sports stars—but not a separate phenomenon. Therefore we should expect celebrity status systems to

have much in common with those of famous people, both past and present."

(Milner, 2010, p380)

The general concept of micro celebrity is the notion of attention that can be obtained by anyone, regardless of talent or skill. Alice Marwick (2010) who wrote 'Status update: celebrity, publicity and self - branding in web 2.0' argues that "People who attract attention without any sense of accomplishment or skill are sometimes derided as 'fame-whores' implying that visibility itself is not enough" (Marwick, 2010, p107). Culture, relationships, politics and business all seem to be incorporating celebrification, the process by which celebrities have become more central to our culture than ever before. This is creating a notion that positioning through self-promotion is a necessary skill for success. (Marwick, 2010. Rojek, 2001. Milner, 2005).

An article exploring the Attention Economy and Micro Celebrity Networked Activism by Tufekci (2013) looks at the impact of the decline in institutional control of attention through the emergence of social media as a platform to instigate social movements within oppressive regimes. He expresses that "Explicit conceptualization of *attention* is a distinct resource" (p850) obtained through new avenues and pathways thanks to new media, to those of traditional mass media methods of attention acquisition that in the past the general lay person would have no access to. Teenagers especially in the present day play out their whole existence, and social interactions through new media; sites such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are providing a platform where "Teens use the affordances of social media to gather attention, involve themselves in others' lives, and manipulate 'public' perceptions." (Marwick & Boyd, 2011). In addition, these fame chasers in fact become self surveillance detectives that can become somewhat obsessed with their, follow, like and share statistics.

This project also aims to explore the value of celebrity in today's society and the current trend in entertainment's democratization of fame and the blurred line between celebrity and the average person. Does a few hundred random people whom you have probably

never met; following or reading your comments make you a micro celebrity? Some mainstream celebrities well known in today's A-list started out this way. Justin Bieber for instance leaped to fame after being discovered by a talent manager who stumbled across his self-made YouTube video. When unknown, untalented individuals post videos that achieve up to a million views per day, today's classic 'stars' must find the landscape of attention has changed and the value of their once deemed god-like popularity is diluted due to this viral new media world.

New Media is a term that is difficult to define, media being the plural of medium the expression 'New Media' is an all-encompassing term referring to the current digitally accessible methods of media such as Internet and social media (Lister et al., 2009). The emergence of social media for the online celebrity phenomenon that is associated with new media. Social media is born out of web 2.0 which is described as the second
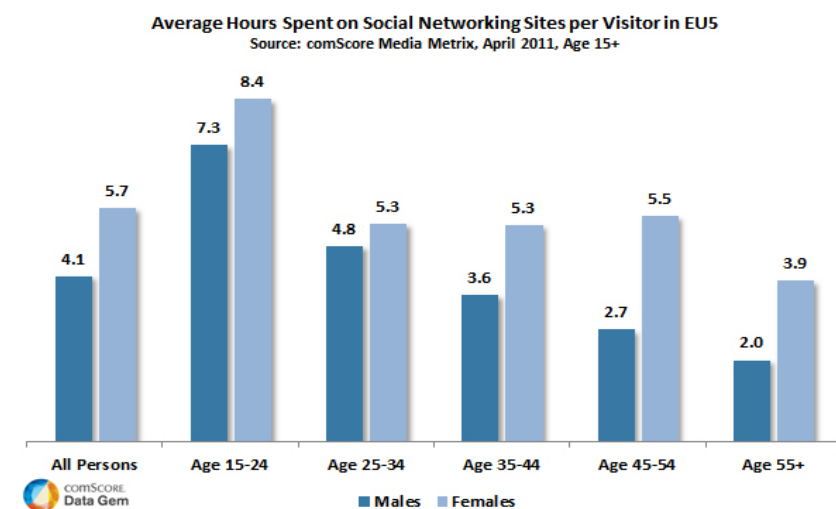
Graph 0 - *Graph showing the hours spent using SMNs. (Social media today, 2014)*

generation of the World Wide Web and provides the ability for people to collaborate and share information online (Lister et al., 2009). This 'generation' is often referred to with common terms such as, social media, participatory media, citizen journalism, user generated content, user driven innovation, and social software. Regardless of which descriptive word is used, they all involve attention hungry users doing work without remuneration. Søren Mørk Petersen (2008), author of Loser Generated Content, states that although somewhat negative sounding, this list of terms should include *"exploitation,*

losers, free labor, and enclosure". In 2013, it was reported that Facebook has 1.15 billion users with 23% checking their account more than 5 times per day; Twitter has 288 million active users with on average 400 million tweets per day and 130 million users on Instagram with on average 40 photos each. 4.2 billion people use their mobiles to access these social media sites. (Social Media Today, 2014).

With all this social media activity, it could be seen as surprising that with the exception of YouTube, the majority of social networks do not provide remuneration for the user generated content involved in creating your online reputation that in turn creates content for these huge grossing media platforms. Tiziana Terranova (2008) highlights the fact that although the 'digital culture' harnesses labour without a direct financial recompense; there are other rewards to 'free labour'. *"Free labour however, is not necessarily exploited labour."* (Terranova, 2008, p47) The pleasure of seeing your contribution publicised, the reward of receiving feedback from people outside your immediate community and of course, the draw of celebrity that may result from your contributions. *"Users are generally referred to as active Internet contributors, who put in a 'certain amount of creative effort', which is 'created outside of professional routines and platforms'".* (Van Dijck, 2009, p53)

It is from this stand point that we will be conducting interviews with a selected group of individuals that regularly engage in activities that attention seekers aiming for micro celebrity status. This research intends to determine to what extent the drive for micro celebrity impacts the volume of engagement an individual is prepared to undertake? It will ask; what is it, about micro celebrity that motivates a person to use their time and effort simply for the establishment of an online reputation? Is micro celebrity a determining factor for the system of social media? What is the value of micro celebrity to a person and to what extent do individuals consider this value? This research hopes to determine, what people currently do within online networks and their reasons for doing it? Are their contributions solely based on the un-secured promise of fame, or are there

other motivations that drive a person to make these inputs. A good understanding of Micro celebrity and Free Labour allows for a better understanding of the user experience based on people's willingness to engage in free participation. User generated content is fundamental to the interface design and the user experience design of most models of new / digital media projects today.

So if it is not for financial gain, what is it that is driving us as a society to allow the publicizing of our life to become so ingrained? This research is designed to discover if it is narcissism that is the driving force. Mark Young and Drew (2006) who address the connection between narcissism and celebrity state that "The term 'narcissism' derives from the Greek myth of Narcissus, a youth who fell in love with his own reflection."(p2) and describe it as having both positive and negative consequences. This is because narcissists are less depressed, extroverted, possess strong initial likability and perform better in public situations whilst on the negative side they crave attention, are over confident and often lack empathy with others. (Young and Pinsky, 2006, p2) By exploring how these traits manifest in social media activities, and by reviewing a range of existing literature that explore the driving force for our engagement in SMNs we hope to use this as a starting block to determine the motivating factors for micro celebrity. Coupled with our study that investigates our participants' motivations through interviews and observations on the actions on SMNs we hope to determine if narcissism in the motivator or if in fact there are other considerations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Narcissism

In order to facilitate a theoretical framework for this research project, this literature review will provide a deeper understanding of existing theories, research and ideas related to the value and motivations of micro celebrity. It will address two questions: 'Is the drive for online popularity fueled by narcissism?' and 'Are all social media users narcissistic?'

The Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) was developed by Raskin and Terry, (1988) its aim was to conceptualise 'narcissism' using a heterogeneous list of traits. Included in this list are "a grandiose sense of self importance or uniqueness; a preoccupation with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love." (Raskin &Terry, 1988, p.891) Narcissists tend to have positive and inflated self-view and generally consider themselves to be intelligent, powerful and physically attractive. (Brown and Zeigler-Hill, 2004) This personality type is usually associated with a low level of agreeableness and a high degree of extroversion. They would be deemed as people who use relationships as opportunities for self-enhancement. Whilst these terms describe the clinical criteria for the narcissistic personality, these characteristics provide indicators of narcissism that will assist this research and will be used to explore if narcissism is prevalent amongst our research user group. However, it will be important to be cautious with the use of these indicators because, as pointed out by Ackerman et al (2011), the NPI measures all of these traits as a single personality. With the tendency to view narcissism as a construct that has negative implications to the person. They argue that the traits listed within this inventory usually deemed negative can also be associated with positive interpersonal traits. (Campbell, 2001, Ackerman et al, 2011) most individuals possess the indicators of narcissism in the form of confidence, a can do attitude and feelings of greatness. The antithesis of Narcissism is insecurity or inadequacy and often social anxiety. Generally

narcissists personality construct are happier than most, less socially anxious, and less depressed. They feel less shame and guilt and have higher self-esteem. (Campbell, 2001) This can potentially impact how we analyse our findings and limit any definitive conclusions we can make as, it seems that there are no absolute ways of characterising a person who is narcissistic only indicators of traits.

Social Media and the Narcissists

Social Media Networks (SMN) are defined as a platform for people to build a public or semi public profile with whom they share a social connection and view and explore their list of connections activities. (Boyd and Ellison, 2007)

Many researchers have explored theories to explain which personality factors predict SMS activities. With the most common identified indicators being narcissism. Often, a narcissist would perform at their best when they see a situation that could provide an opening for public glory. (Buss and Chiodo, 1991, Brown and Zeigler-Hill, 2004) In order to maintain the narcissists inflated self-view, these individuals seek continual reinforcement from the social environment. (Campbell, 2001) Social media is providing an idyllic gateway to nourish narcissistic behaviours by providing a platform for self promotion via self description, vanity (via photos) and shallow relationships. (Gentile, 2011, Buffardi and Campbell, 2008, Carpenter 2012)

Whilst most researchers support this 'narcissists need for attention' social media theory, there are others that suggests that the socially anxious individual with a need to belong can also engage in SMN for the same reasons as a narcissist (Weiss, 2013).

Therefore, as also pointed out by Ackerman et al, for this study it is important not to associate these traits to narcissism but to consider how these online activities could also be indicators such for need for belonging. Many individuals use social media to maintain deeper relationships with people. Narcissists would be eager to talk about themselves and boost about their achievements through this media highly controlled environment

where as the socially anxious would have more of a tendency to engage in conversation, share their insecurities to gain support and assurance from their peers. Narcissistic social relationships tend to be high in number but low in substance. Socially anxious on the other hand have more of a communication element using social media to share, engage and develop more meaningful relationships (Buffardi and Campbell, 2008, Carpenter, 2012). The theories outlined by Buffardi, Campbell and Carpenter will provide a guidance when observing a users posting activity, allowing us to determine whether the user falls into a 'need for belonging' or the 'need to be seen' group.

In the article 'It is all about being popular: the effects of need for popularity on social network site use' Sonja Utz et al (2012) studies in to the motivations for social usage such as: need to belong, self esteem, entitlement, vanity and a need for popularity, identify self focused traits all with a negative connotation. Although, consistent with previous research, they found that a need for popularity relates positively to vanity, entitlement and narcissism. This study also found that narcissism links closely with profile enhancements and disclosure of feelings. Both of these are indicators that narcissists believe in their superiority, but do not strive to leave a positive impression. Their test study participants' social network behaviour varied based on their personality characteristics. Indicators were that there could be a relationship between self esteem and self disclosure in which participants that engage in large amounts of self discloser often suffer with low self esteem. Often the hope of receiving positive feedback, recognition could lead to online friendships that can boost self esteem. Those with a 'need to belong' found satisfaction with a few intimate relationships, whilst in those on the other end of the spectrum: 'entitlement, vanity and need for popularity' aimed to achieve acceptance by a much larger group of peers. Relationships on SMNs tend to be superficial and often of loose connection. Based on the above findings the authors argue that 'need for popularity' is a better predictor of social media use than 'needing to belong'.

The pattern laid out by these various articles all point to narcissism and the idea that

SMNs provide the perfect platform for those with this need for popularity. This research project aims to identify the self awareness of users engaging in social media of their activities that would be considered narcissistic. It also aims to determine if, like the points laid out by Utz et al, social media users can be grouped as narcissistic or socially anxious; or if there are instances where the lines are blurred and users present with a combination of these factors. In addition, the research hopes to identify if there is potential a third group 'those seeking online fame' as SMNs provide the platform for a user to be selective with their self-presentation.

Understanding Micro Celebrity

The term 'Micro Celebrity' as described by Terry Senft (2008) who originally coined the term in her book Camgirls is *"a new style of online performance ... involves people 'amping-up' their popularity over the web using technologies like video, blogs and social networking sites"* (p. 25). Specific references of the term "Micro Celebrity" is uncommon in academic literature, this is for two main reasons. Firstly, 'Micro Celebrity' is a relatively new term predominantly quoted by non-academic sources. Secondly, when academics refer to the idea of micro celebrity they would often use terms such as 'online fame seekers', 'fame fantasy users' and 'need for popularity'.

In Senft's (2012) later chapter in Blackwell Companion to New Media Dynamics entitled 'Micro celebrity and the branded self' she redefines micro celebrity as "the commitment to deploying and maintaining one's online identity as if it were a branded good, with the expectation that others do the same" (Senft, 2012, p346). She expresses (ibid, p347) that anyone who has an online profile is a person who has micro celebrity tendencies. This is because of the sheer nature of SMNs is victim to the spectators and fans eager to learn more about our lives and never before have people had so much access to see what takes place in our lives. We all therefore instinctively manage our online persona because it is very much a public stage. She argues that this vigilance of our online self is

conducted with the diligence usually *"exhibited by those who have historically believed themselves to be their own product: artists and entrepreneurs."* (ibid, p347)

Unlike the traditional celebrities, which Senft indentifies to be commodities masquerading as people, the micro celebrity is a person that experiments with branding themselves as a commodity (Senft, 2008, p26). Within Camgirls (2008), micro celebrity, as a theory seems to mainly focus on self-branding. However, there is a strong theme where that focus aims to dispel the notion that fame seeking webcam girls are driven simply by narcissism and pornography. Her statement "on the web popularity depends upon a connection to one's audience, rather than an enforced separation from them" (ibid, p26) indicates that narcissism traits are contradictory to micro celebrity in that they need to build a connection and relationship.

In contrast to Senft, Lakshmi Chaudhry's (2007) in her article entitled 'Mirror, Mirror On the Web' is taking the foundations of Leo Braudy's arguments in 'The frenzy of Renown' (1986) and argues that narcissism is the driving force of fame. Chaudhry points out that narcissistic tendency's leading to the desire for fame have been prevalent in society since the birth of media. Braudy wrote, "In our time merely being looked at carries all the necessary ennoblement" (Braudy, 1986, p. 20). The desire for fame has existed from the early days of the renaissance era to the modern age of media, with the increased level of access to information "the more ways we have to be known". They argue it is inevitable that the Internet, which offers more accessibly should in turn devalue the term "famous" to the degree it is today. These words from 1986 today ring much truer in that the kudos once afforded to a person for simply being on TV or their picture in a paper is divorced from achievement and stripped back to its "basic ingredient of being on seen". Although this attention can then be used to develop a lucrative career as did the punk-rock group Fall Out Boy tying in with Senft's point about micro celebrities being about micro celebrities branding themselves; making attention a commodity available to everyone. Ironically, as pointed out by José Van Dijck (2009) in his article 'Users like you?' "Online

fame only counts as fame after it is picked up by traditional mass media – television, movies, and newspapers" (p53). If Chaudhry's point: "If these corporate technologies of self promotion work as well as promised they will render fame meaningless" (Chaudhry, 2007, p.22) is true, then this leaves the question: if we are all famous who is left to be our audience? Are we a nation weaned on the fantasy of celebrity driven through media and media technologies that "escape from democracy with its attendant demands for responsibility and participation"? (ibid, p.22) Understanding this history of the 'need for fame' will assist in identifying motivations, by considering whether this is an ingrained trait developed through our history or simply an individual's narcissistic self view of importance, brought about by the ease of access to fame.

Dara Greenwoods (2013) article 'Fame, Facebook, and Twitter: How Attitudes About Fame Predict Frequency and Nature of Social Media Use' explores how an individuals' psychological tendencies (e.g., attachment style, body image, belongingness needs) are related to the nature and degree of their engagement with the social environment of the mass media. She investigates whether the search for fame and celebrity (micro celebrity) status predicts the nature and frequency of engagement in social media activities determining the activity differences between pro-social (or socially anxious; those wishing to engage and build their social ties) and fame fantasy users (those who fantasize about fame and the perceived realism of becoming famous one day).

By examining the usage, methods, motivations and behavioural differences and undertakings of their test group Greenwood found that those using social media that found fame and celebrity particularly appealing had a tendency to engage in exhibitionist self-expression and self-promotion postings on these social media sites. This links with the research by Utz et al, in that these activities have a strong link to behaviours of needing to belong and narcissism. Further indications are that in addition to self promotion, those with a drive for fame and visibility status tended to not only follow highly visible media figures but actively engaged with them through 'likes and comments' with the

hope to be noticed and/or appreciated by the media celebrity in question, or even better the possibility of a response 're-tweet' which would provide high status attention focus perpetuating the celebrity recognition fantasies by providing them fifteen minutes of fame. This study is vital to our project as it helps to identify the actual online behaviours and activities to identify a user that is seeking micro celebrity.

Using Greenwoods study and the research into narcissistic indicators for social media use by Buffardi and Campbell (2008) the aim is to determine if there can be a clear line of distinction between the driving factors of social media use. Whilst socially anxious users tend to be less activated by the need to be seen but rather the need to feel meaningfully and positively connected to others these aspirations are still tied to fame, these findings reduce the assumption that social media use is simply a symptom of an increasingly narcissistic generation. (Greenwood, 2013)

METHODOLOGY

Research Hypothesis:

This investigation consists of 4 steps

1. Evaluate the frequency with which the participants engage with SMNs in particular Facebook and Instagram. Looking closely at the specific interactions each participant engages in when connected to these SMNs, whether it be responding, messaging or lurking.

2. Consider associations between narcissism, social anxiety and need for popularity by assessing the types of posts and the volume of these types of posts. Consistent with past research, narcissism should be associated with a greater number of self-promotion posts (Hypothesis A), whilst social anxiety should consist of a larger amount of communication and emotional posts (Hypothesis B). The number of witty and entertaining posts would be an indication of their desire to gain popularity (Hypothesis C).

3. Examine the main profile picture to assess if (a) provocative and demonstrating their self-promoting 'sexiness' which would imply narcissistic tendencies (Hypothesis D) or (b) the image is more silly, fun and non-provocative indicating non-narcissistic tendency (Hypothesis E).

4. Determine the characteristics of a micro celebrity.

Methods Used:

The chosen methodology for this research included structured interviews and observations. Structured interviews are interviews that follow a pre –set order. The questions and order that the questions presented in are all predetermined. Interviews are widely used in social research as it enables the researcher able to obtain qualitative data it is especially common amongst those researching within the psychology and sociology subjects. The validity of data gained from interviews however often comes in to question. According to Peter Marshall (1997, p49) who writes of the strengths and weaknesses of research methods, it is important to understand the contributing factors

that could affect data such as the participants motivation, comfortableness, memory decay and bias that could affect both the participant and interviewer. This is largely down to 'social desirability bias' and its influence on the ultimate usefulness of our qualitative and quantitative data. Its potential impact on answers can present in either over or under reporting in areas such as abilities, personality and behavior. According to 'The Psychology of Survey Response' written by Tourangeau, Rips, and Rasinski (2000, p257) during interviews "participants believe there are norms defining desirable attitudes and behaviors, and that they are concerned enough about these norms to distort their answers to avoid presenting themselves in an unfavorable light." To try to counteract this phenomenon from occurring, the consent form (appendix 1) tries to instill confidence of confidentiality.

The reason for combining interviews with observations in this methodology is to follow the advice by Bill Moggridge (2007) who talks of how to design interactions that observations can show you what people are doing rather than what they say they are doing. Also the likelyhood of a participant being able to provide accurate information regarding their posting activity would be challenging.

Therefore the observations were designed to measure the types of posts each participant engages in and to what extent and compare this data to that gained through interviews. Specifically looking for evidence of the traits associated with narcissistic, need to popular and socially anxious behaviours out lined in the literature review.

Participants and Procedure

In this study 20 participants (11 Women and 9 Men) took part. The SMNs primarily used by this group include Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat and Tumbler. For the purpose of this study we will be observing and assessing the usage of Facebook and Instagram as these were the most popular across the board.

Interviews

There were 13 interviews conducted of which 10 will be used for this study. The reason for excluding 3 interviews is that we were unable to gain access to observe the participants profile pages to assess their social media usage data.   The 10 interviewees comprised of 6 Women and 4 Men with ages ranging from 15 to 35 (M=24.5, SD=7.41).

The interview commenced with an introduction to the aim of the study (without mentioning the research question variables so as not to contaminate the interviewees with these concepts). A consent form (See Appendix 1) was used to request permission to observe their social media activities. The interviews were conducted face to face, via video call and on the telephone. Interviewees were selected on the basis that they spend a large amount of time using social media. There were 21 specific questions about participants' daily SMN use and questions about their view on their social media experiences (see appendix 2).

The questionnaire was designed to gather information about:

- The number of followers and friend per SMN
- The amount of time a participant invests per day connected to SMNs
- What activities they engage in whilst connected to SMNs
- Why they do specific activities and how it makes them feel.
- How often the review their popularity
- What kind of posts they regularly do

Measuring Usage and Engagement Levels

Observations on the participants actual post activities, number of friends profile picture and communication levels on their SMN profile pages were conducted.

Facebook Observations

Observations on 10 Women and 7 Men aged between 15 and 48 (M= 29.76, SD=8.75)

9 of these had also taken part in the interview.

Data was collected by observing the last 20 posts of each participant's wall to gather data on the following:

1. 'selfie' images/videos
2. Fun images/videos
3. Sharing content
4. Post about a specific hobby, industry or interest
5. Personal feelings or thoughts
6. Where they have been
7. The most common post type out of 1 to 6 (above)
8. The number of friends/followers
9. The type of profile picture they have

Instagram Observations

Observations on 10 Women and 8 Men aged between 15 and 36 (M= 27.05, SD=6.97)

10 of these participants had also taken part in the interview.

Similar to data collected on Facebook using the last 20 posts of each participant we gathered data on the following:

1. 'selfie' images/videos
2. Fun images/videos
3. Witty / Entertaining quotes
4. Post about a specific hobby, industry or interest
5. Posts about other people
6. Posts showing how popular they are
7. Posts that initiated communication
8. The number of friends
9. The number of followers
10. The type of profile picture they have

DATA ANALYSIS:

Pertinent results generated through the data gathered during the interviews and observations have been visually displayed in order to assist communication of the findings and promote better understanding.
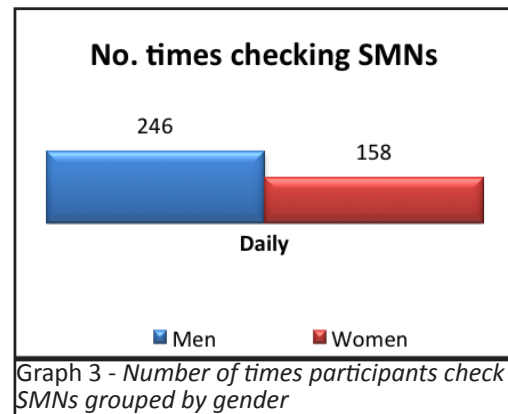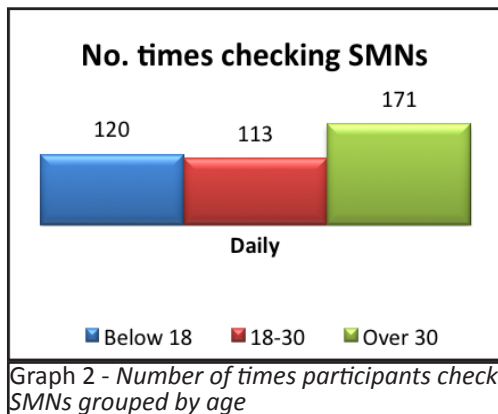
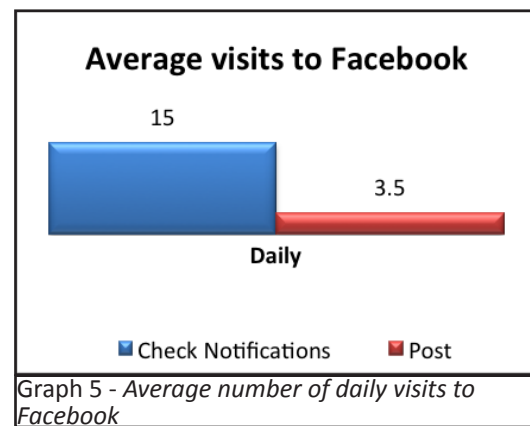Graph 1: illustrates the participant's top 3 most used SMNs.

Graph 1 - *The most popular SMNs amongst study participants'*
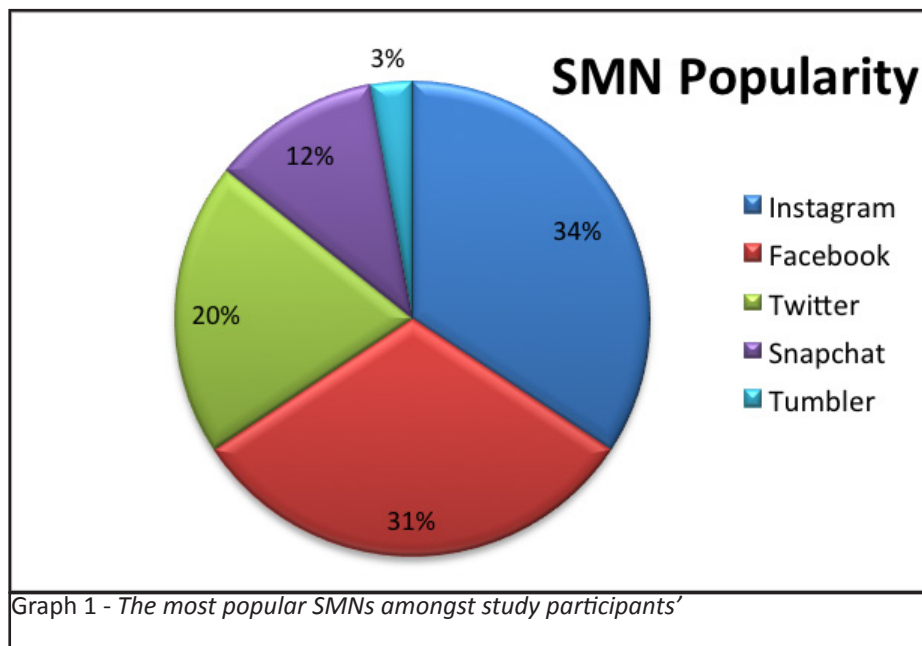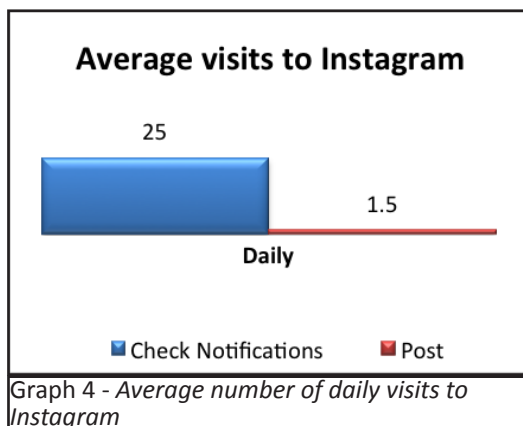
Participants during interview where asked which SMNs they us the most (maximum 3 recorded) although not all participants used as many as 3 different networks.

- **Facebook** is a social networking website that allows registered users to create profiles, upload photos and video, send messages and keep in touch with friends, family and colleagues. (Facebook, 2014)

- **Instagram** is an online mobile photo-sharing, video-sharing and social networking service that enables its users to take pictures and videos, apply digital filters to them. (Instagram, 2014)

Graphs 2, 3, 4 and 5 demonstrate the data collected regarding engagement in SMNs from the 10 participants that took part in the interviews.   Graph 2 and 3 displays the combined data gathered regarding the number of times the participants check their notifications and add posts. Graph 2 is grouped by age and Graph 3 is grouped by gender:

No. times checking SMNs

171

120   113

Daily

■ Below 18   ■ 18-30   ■ Over 30

Graph 2 - *Number of times participants check SMNs grouped by age*

No. times checking SMNs

246

158

Daily

■ Men   ■ Women

Graph 3 - *Number of times participants check SMNs grouped by gender*

Graph 4 and 5 is an average of the combined results for all participants specific to the two most common SMNs Instagram and Facebook.

Average visits to Instagram

25

1.5

Daily

■ Check Notifications   ■ Post

Graph 4 - *Average number of daily visits to Instagram*

Average visits to Facebook

15

3.5

Daily

■ Check Notifications   ■ Post

Graph 5 - *Average number of daily visits to Facebook*

To determine how participants use there time whilst engaged on SMNs we ask them to breakdown how they would split their time between Posting, Responding and Lurking.

- **Posting** includes: adding statuses, sharing content, adding and updating information or pictures.

- **Responding** includes: Messaging and responding to messages.

- **Lurking** includes: viewing others, profiles, pictures and reading news feeds.

Graphs 6 and 7 reveals the breakdown of how the participants split their time whilst engaged in each SMN.

Graph 6 - *Breakdown of time spent on Facebook*

Graph 7 - *Breakdown of time spent on Instagram*
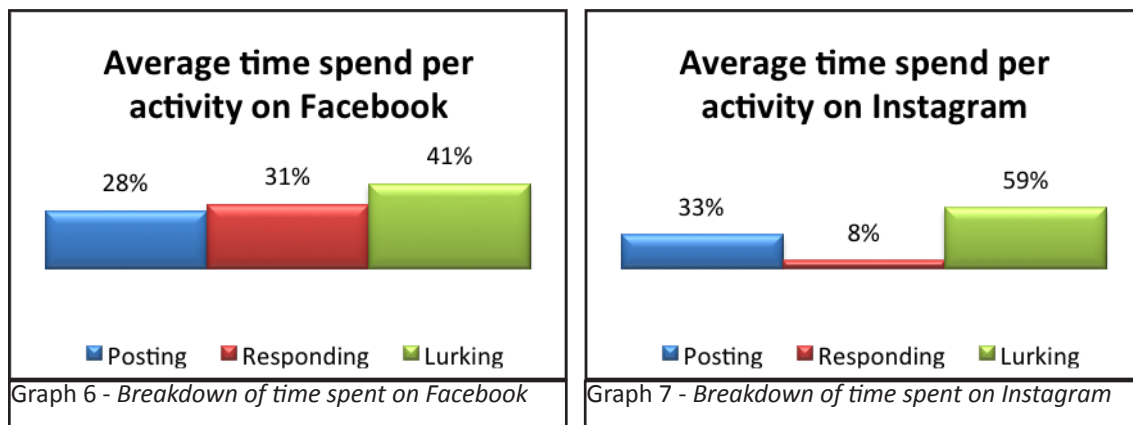
The following graphs displays data on the results from observations made on the participants' social media pages. They are broken down in to the most common post types found per SMN and the gender differences. Graph 8 shows the most common post type for Facebook and graphs 9 and 10 show the variation between men and women.
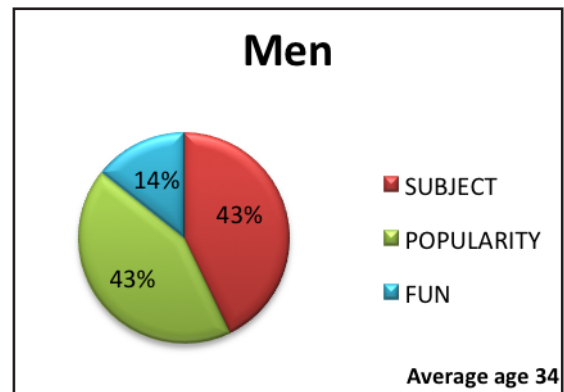
Facebook post types:

>**Emotional:** posts about the participants thoughts of feelings

>**Subject:** posts specific to a hobby, business or industry.

>**Popularity:** Posts showing popularity usually group images

>**Self:** images of the participant only

>**Fun:** All other posts

Graph 8 - *Participants' most common post types on Facebook*
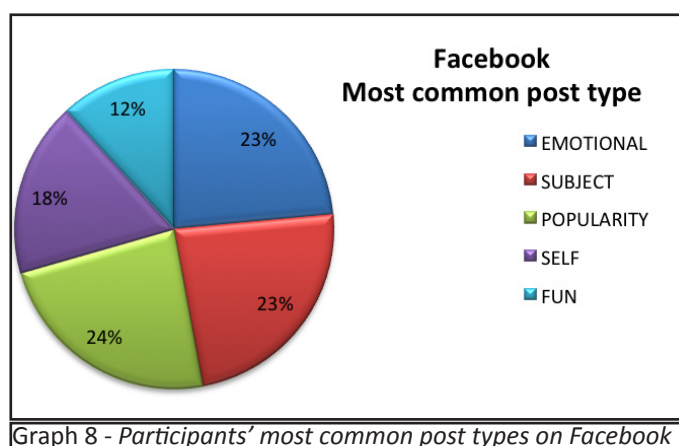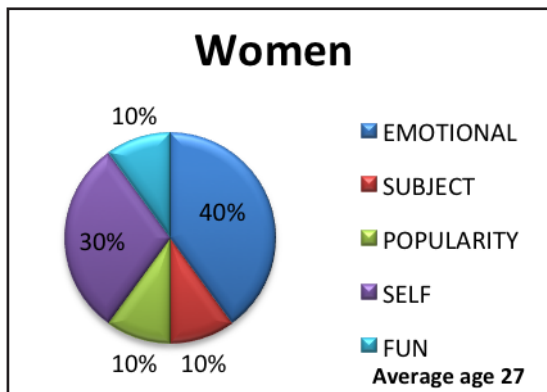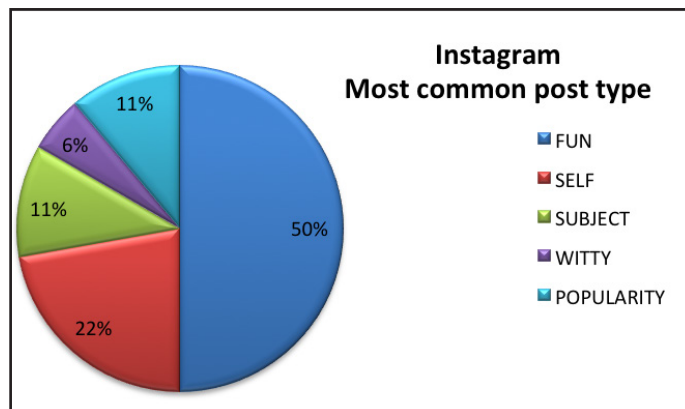
Graph 9 - *Women's most common post types on Facebook*
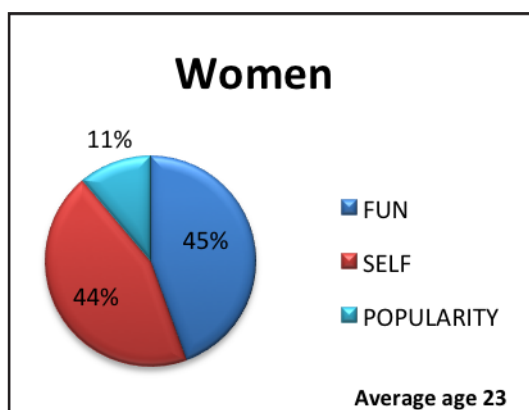

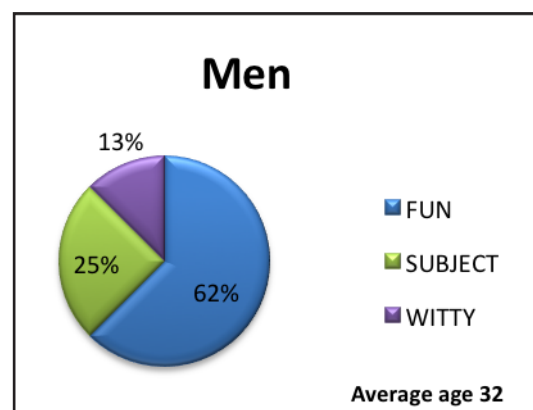
Graph 10 - *Men's most common post types on Facebook*

Graph 11 - *Participants' most common post types on Instagram*

Instagram post types:

>Self: images of the participant only

>Subject: images specific to a hobby, business or industry.

>Witty: Images of text that have jokes or quotes.

>Popularity: Images showing popularity usually group pictures.

>Fun: All other images

Graph 12 - *Women's most common post types on Instagram*

Graph 13 - *Men's most common post types on Instagram*

DATA INTERPRETATION

Our investigation consisted of the following 4 steps:

1. Evaluate the frequency with which the participants engage with SMNs in particular Facebook and Instagram. Looking closely at the specific interactions each participant engages in when connected to these SMNs, whether it be responding, messaging or lurking.

2. Consider associations between narcissism, social anxiety and need for popularity by assessing the types of posts and the volume of these types of posts. **Consistent with past research, narcissism should be associated with a greater number of self-promotion posts (Hypothesis A), whilst social anxiety should consist of a larger amount of communication and emotional posts (Hypothesis B). The number of witty and entertaining posts would be an indication of their desire to gain popularity (Hypothesis C)**.

3. Examine the main profile picture to assess if **(a) provocative and demonstrating their self-promoting 'sexiness' which would imply narcissistic tendencies (Hypothesis D) or (b) the image is more silly, fun and non-provocative indicating non-narcissistic tendency (Hypothesis E)**.

4. Determine the characteristics of a micro celebrity.

Results for Narcissism

To test Hypothesis A, that narcissism would predict the quantity of posts about the self on SMNs, we correlated those with the most and found that those with the largest amount of self-postings were all women (see Tables K and H). In most cases, those with predominantly self-promoting profiles (5 out of 20 participants) rarely had any posts of a different nature such as fun, witty or shared content. They also tended to have a large number of comments on each posting however these all tended to be praise

of the participant appearance. Another notable point is that these participants are all unemployed (age M= 20.4, SD=7.5). Interestingly, when we looked at the answers this group gave to the question 'what makes a person popular online' all of their answers centred on the amount of followers and likes a person receives. These findings feed into the Brown & Zeigler's (2004) notion that narcissists tend to not be concerned about communication and social interaction just the recognition of their talents (as they see them).

Although these results cannot validate the presence of narcissism (Hypothesis A), there are clear indications that participants, who post the most images of self, are confident in the fact that they are attractive. This is in line with the Raskin and Terry (1988) Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) as their profiles do represent a high level of extroversion whilst at the same time possess very little communication. Comments made on their pictures by their 'friends / followers' were rarely responded to and there were few representations of anything other than images of themselves looking their best. These points would indicate NPI traits leading us to conclude narcissism although during interviews these particular participants without exception were found to be the most challenging when it came to questions about their posts types. All appeared to be rather nervous and uncomfortable discussing their social media activities and all seemed manifest the attributes associated with Tourangeau, Rips, and Rasinski's (2000) notion of social desirability bias in that they all attempted to down play the volume of posts, friends, how much time spent engaging and reasons for using their preferred SMNs. This brings up question, whether the traits that are deemed to be Narcissistic, as per the warnings set out by Ackerman et al (2001) and Weiss (2013) maybe indicators of the antithesis of narcissism; a socially anxious person whom is desperate to receive approval? If judgment were based solely on the socially desirable bias behaviour that appeared to be shown during their interview, it would definitely fall in to the socially anxious group. However, if we are to consider Hypothesis B, the 'need to engage' and 'develop meaningfully relationships' tendencies associated with the socially anxious

outlined by Weiss, (2012), Buffardi and Campbell, (2008) and Carpenter, (2012), then the lack of communication and replies to the comments made on their posts would indicate the opposite. Due to the limited nature of this study, as we are unable to confirm if these indicators can determine exclusively if a person is driven by narcissism or social anxiety, future research should continue to examine this.

Results for Social Anxiety

Research findings for Hypothesis B were similar to Utz et al's (2012). The participants who posted a majority of posts about their feelings and emotions were all female (see Table K). In addition the participants in this group had a two coinciding characteristics: all had a low number of friends (Average = 343), compared to the rest of the participants (Group Average = 1621) and their profile pictures (Hypothesis E) showed more of a loving nature (pictures with a partner or children). There was also, clear indication from their posts, and communications ensuing from these posts, that they enjoyed the positive feedback and recognition received. In most cases a conversation continued from a single reply from one of their friends or followers in to a conversation that found other users joining. The appearance of these participants' profiles had a distinct community feel and warmth to them, which mirrors Utz et al's (2012) description for need to belong characteristics (p38).

Results for Need for Popularity

Participants with a majority of witty posts have very high communications stats, where each posts seems to spark conversation. These users however don't appear to fall in the socially anxious group as described by Weiss (2013) as there are no posts of feelings. In unison with Hypothesis C, the high communication demonstrates their popularity and audience approval symbolised by the large number of followers they have of which the majority actively engage. The participants with witty posts seem to contradict the characteristics associated with social anxiety and narcissistic behaviour and are more

suited to the 'need for popularity' group illustrated by Utz et al (2012) as superficial and loosely connected relationships which would imply that their motivation driven by online popularity and sociability.

Results for Micro Celebrity

An interesting finding from this research was the results from the participants that would fall into Senft's (2008) micro celebrity category, this group all have very few and most cases no posts of self, shared content, wit or fun. They all have a friend or fan base of more than 2500k. They also all have some form of subject, all except one post about upcoming events and newly developed music, (female) with the remaining an activist for the rights of dogs. All but one of the group were male, and when asked what they deem to be a popular person online their focus was not around the number of likes a person received as per the narcissistic group instead it was focused on the professionalism and engagement of the persons post with no mention of the number of likes received. This would imply that the characteristics afforded to the narcissistic, socially anxious and need to belong hold no basis with this group. As Senft (2008) contends, these traits are contradictory to micro celebrity.

CONCLUSION

We investigated the triggers for engagement and specifically looked at the role narcissism plays in a persons motiviation to engage in SMNs. We conducted interviews and observations on a group of participants to establish patterns of behaviour, looking closely at the specific interactions our participants have with SMNs. We considered existing literature on narcissism, social anxiety, need for popularity and micro celebrity and compared the literature to our findings.

As a general concept, micro celebrity is deemed to be exclusive to the practice of gaining fame through the Internet by user tailoring content presented to the 'audience' in order

to grab attention and gain fans. Investigating the question as to whether this phenomenon is driven by narcissism has brought up some interesting themes. Firstly, narcissistic traits seem to be prevalent in participants that would generally not be associated with narcissism instead be referred to as needing to belong or socially anxious. This leads us to question wether social media activities are as driven by narcissism as the literature implied. Secondly, previous researchers in this area all seem to endeavor to make clear distinctions that SMN users are either narcissistic or socially anxious. However the results of this research seem to have found that the lines between the two are invariably blurred and therefore cannot be grouped as narcissistic or socially anxious as the traits associated with these groups can be found across the board with our participants. Therefore our findings suggest that there are 4 quite distinct groups of SMN users:

> **Socialites** - with a majority of fun and witty posts have very high communications stats - people who used sites in intense short bursts to flirt, meet new people and entertainment.

> **Attention seekers** - largest amount of self-posting - people who craved attention and comments from others, often by posting provocative photos of themselves.

> **Lost & found** – with the majority of posts about their feelings and emotions - people that typically use SMNs to maintain old friendships and family connections.

> **Entrepreneurs** - people who tended to be single-minded in using SMN sites.

Although not conclusive this study has provided valuable insights and understanding of how micro celebrity, narcissism and self-esteem are constructed within SMNs. Arguments that micro celebrity is resulting in a cheapening of the value of fame seems pessimistic, instead we suggest that, fame is not cheapening in value but rather changing in to notoriety. Celebrity is simply based on you having an audience, and with SMNs we ALL have an audience.

There is a potential bias with this study which could have been avoided by increasing the number of participants who were varying in age, gender, and race. Future research should continue to address this area with a more objective measure of self-promotion.

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TABLE OF GRAPHS

APPENDIX 1:

Sample Questionaire consent form

QUESTIONAIRE CONSENT FORM

I am an undergraduate student at University of East London. My name is Sarah Nelson and I can be contacted at u1146709@uel.ac.uk

I am currently researching what drives social media network usage and how people engage with them. My research requires that I collect information on how people use social media, what type of activities they undertake and why. I am therefore asking if you would agree to participate in my research by answering a questionnaire.

The questionnaire has (10-20) questions and should take about (5) minutes to complete.

In addition to the questionnaire I would like to make observations on your social media activities by viewing your profile. The viewing will take approximately 1 day and will consist of me following your profile to collect data on the types of activities you undertake on a daily basis. After the 1 day observation, I will un-friend and cease from following your profile.

You do not have to participate and if you later decided you do not wish to be included, even after participation, you can terminate at any time without prejudice. If there are any questions you do not feel comfortable answering you can simple skip them. Your name will not be attached to the questionnaire and I will ensure that your participation remains confidential.

Although I will include your responses in my final document, all responses would be anonymous.

By participating in this study, you risk being upset or made uncomfortable by the questions asked.

Please provide your provide name in order for observations:	
Facebook	
Instagram	
Twitter	

_____   _____
Participant signature   Date

_____   _____
Researcher Signature   Date

APPENDIX 2:

Sample Questionaire

The purpose of this study is to explore in more detail what activities individuals undertake whilst engaging in social media networks and what motivates and drives people to engage in social media networks.

On average, per posting how many likes would you achieve: *Please circle the most appropriate:*			
1-20	20-50	50-100	100+

Approximately how many friends/followers do you have:	*Please circle the most appropriate:*	1-100	100-200	200-300	400+
	Facebook				
	Instagram				
	Twitter				

	Facebook	Instagram	Twitter
Do you use any of the following social media networks? *Please write yes/no*			
What do you find most appealing about:			
Approximately how many times per day do you check your notifications:			
How often do you change your profile image? And why do you change it?			
Approximately how many posts would you make per day:			
How much of your time is split between the media platforms: % *Example: 50% - facebook, 10% - twitter, 40% - instagram*			

During a session on Facebook, Instagram or Twitter, what percentage of your time include the following activities:	Facebooook	Instagram	Twitter
Postings:	%	%	%
Responding:	%	%	%
Lurking:	%	%	%

Why do you post pictures, tweet and update your status:	
Do you follow over 10 famous people of celebrities?	
If yes, why do you follow them?	
How often do you check your popularity stats?	
How would you describe a popular person online?	

What do you post about?	
Posts about how you feel about a particular issue or news story	
Posts about other people	
Posts that share content	
Posts that promote some activity you do	
Posts about what you have been doing during the day	
Post about what you have been doing for the day	

Would you be happy to be interviewed further on this subject?   Yes   No

If yes, please could you provide your contact number _____

Social Anxiety

Friends

Need for Popularity

Interviews

Responding

Self-esteem

Lurking

Online

Famous

Insecurity

Famewhores

Narcissism

Observations

Followers

Instagram

Social Media Networks

Like

MicroCelebrity

Narcissistic Personality Inventory

Need for Attention

Facebook

Blog: www.u1146709.wordpress.com

MS3307 - CW2 - 15th August 2014

Sarah Nelson