Positive And Negative Effects Of Social Media On Interpersonal Communication

Interpersonal communication is the exchange of information and emotion through face to face verbal and non verbal interactions. Social media is argued to have both a positive and negative effect on this, with the rise of social networking becoming extremely apparent in recent years resulting in 50% of teenagers believing they are addicted to their phone. One of the benefits of this is that they have the ability to further improve their online relationships on a global scale. However, this causes a risk to their offline relationships due to prioritising their online self-constructed persona. Social media can have an impact on a variety of factors including mental health, self-perception and relationships which we will be discussing within this essay.

Self-concept and self-perception are significant components of interpersonal communication, the perceptions we hold about ourselves will inevitably infiltrate through our communication practices. Self-concept can be defined as 'The individual's belief about himself or herself, including the person's attributes and who and what the self is' (Baumeister, 1999). It is a reflection of others opinions and responses to the individual. Furthermore, self-perception is a construction a person has about the kind of individual they are, this may contrast from others perception of them.

Social media platforms, such as instagram extert unrealistic, unattainable expectations for young people. It forces individuals to constantly portray the ‘best version’ of themselves online with comparison to others being highly likely during this process.Teenagers especially place high value on their social media lives. If someone isn't deemed ‘popular’ on social media they may consequently view themselves as less worthy than someone with more likes and/or followers. It can be argued that social networking sites have taken and adapted the negative role magazines used to play in teenagers lives. Celebrities with surgically enhanced features and airbrushed complexions dominate social media, thus creating idealistic beauty standards, further impacting self-concept and perception amongst teenagers and young adults.

It remains apparent that social media does have a progressive impact on how we view ourselves, with it being linked to the rise in anxiety, depression, body dysmorphia and other mental health disorders. All of which consequently affect interpersonal communication, whether we are consciously aware of it or not. Individuals often may find themselves adapting their communication style and habits to ‘make up for what they see as a deficiency in their personality.’(Samthirao 2016) For example, attempting to appear as a more extroverted character. As a result of this, interpersonal communication could begin to feel unnatural, leading individuals to avoid social situations. However, it can be argued that social media compensates for lost interactions as it creates a platform for people who are unable to express themselves in face to face situations. People that suffer from severe anxiety now have an alternative way to form relationships, which they may have missed out on due to them finding socialising distressing.

Self disclosure is defined as: Information intentionally communicated about person A to any person(s) via any form of communication and interaction by person A. Houghton, D., Joinson, A., Cladwell, N., & Marder, B. (2013). This therefore is a key role in interpersonal

communication because it determines how much one reveals of themself to another. Levels of self disclosure alter from offline and online interactions especially with the apparent rise of social media.

Social media is extremely popular, especially amongst the teenage generation. In the view of the fact that it isn't face to face; there is a sense of anonymity which enhances our confidence and encourages us to make riskier decisions. This allows us to disclose more personal information and communicate unreservedly. The effect that it has on interpersonal communication is highly debated and could be seen in both positive and negative lights. However in terms of self disclosure, social media tends to have mostly a positive effect. When interacting with others online, you remain hidden and you can create your own best version of yourself, resulting in less anxiety about how others will perceive and judge you, giving you more confidence to disclose more information about yourself. Furthermore, it is argued that "self-disclosure usually increases when there is no anticipated future interaction" (Thibaut and Kelly, 1959): with online interactions through social media, you can discontinue it whenever you want, and there is no need for any future interactions. Consequently, backing up the idea that self-disclosure increases online. Meaning that we are more likely to communicate more on social media rather than offline in a face to face situation. This also links to the fact that online consequences seem to be significantly minimal compared to offline, there is also less risk of manufacturing negative consequences for yourself. Therefore people are more confident in how they act and communicate because they've got less to lose; increasing self disclosure.

Snapchat is a social media app used amongst most teenagers of this generation. It is a way to communicate with pictures and messages that disappear after a certain amount of time. Taking this into consideration, it explains why users may be more confident with what they say because they know that the messages will disappear and there won't be any permanent consequences. As a result, self disclosure may be greater than usual. Snapchat also allows individuals to have greater control over how they portray themselves. This is because you are hidden behind a phone and can act as a different person to how you may act offline. In addition, the app itself has camera features allowing you to change your appearance with an edited filter. Taking this into consideration, individuals will have more confidence and willingness to reveal more personal information. They will also be given the freedom to express aspects of themselves without fear of any disapproval or negative consequences on their offline daily lives (Bargh, McKenna and Fitzimmons, 2002; Schau and Gilly, 2003). Therefore, the importance of interpersonal communication is not as significant.

Some people argue that the excessive use of social media can cause loneliness and actually have a reverse effect on our communication and socialisation skills, making us less able to communicate verbally and isolated from the offline world. This is a result of spending too much time online and not enough offline time spent with friends and family, giving you a tighter online circle of friends but damaging your offline relationships. However, it could be argued that using social media is a way to enhance and develop your offline relationships. This is because you have the ability to have further communication with individuals when you're not able to physically be with each other. It is all a matter of how much time you spend online and how good your communication skills are offline; if you're able to have a good balance and maintain your relationships. Furthermore, Amichai-Hamburger and Ben-Artzi (2003) argue that the internet use does not directly cause loneliness; people that are lonely spend more time online. Which could argue the point that social media as a platform, has allowed people who struggle with communication and forming relationships offline, to practice their social skills and initiate

online relationships. Therefore social media has had a positive effect in improving our interpersonal communication skills.

Social media and the internet facilitates easier communication and interaction with one and other by allowing you to think about what you are going to say before you say it. Meaning that hopefully, you won't say the wrong thing. It also enables you to immediately leave situations/conversations you don't want to be in, whereas in offline situations you wouldn't have that ability. Therefore communication online is of a very high standard, however it can result in having poor interpersonal communication skills. This is due to the fact that individuals will be so used to how they communicate online that they won't be able to adapt and communicate effectively offline. In addition, when communicating over social media individuals vocabulary worsens and isn't parallel to how you'd speak face to face. 'Text chat' is used and certain slang, to make it easier and more efficient to message. Thus, risking our levels of vocabulary in the real life world and making our interpersonal communication decline.

Interpersonal communication skills are a vital part of offline romantic relationships. The foundations of a good relationship rely on the understanding and communication of emotion between both persons. Social media creates a metaphorical barrier for this type of communication, with many couples blaming the fault of their relationship down to the pressure of social media and the implications that can arise from it. The more submerged an individual is in their phone, the more likely their relationships are going to suffer as they struggle to recognise, understand and empathise with others emotions. As mentioned, individuals often prioritize their online relationships, an example of this would be a study by Haynes (2016) which he found 'romantic relationships will only gain its 'official' validity by being published as a Facebook 'relationship update'' in North Chile. It is clear that this concept is apparent in most areas of the world today, resulting in a lack of physical real relationships and connections. Thus, affecting their interpersonal communication skills and increasing the chance of loneliness along with a sense of unfulfillment for many people.

Tinder is now a large aspect of many individuals dating and romantic lives. However the popular dating app is now being related to low self-esteem. It adapts and changes the whole concept of conventional dating, immediately removing a large part of interpersonal communication from the relationships formed on the app. The majority of an individual's time on Tinder is simply spent swiping either left or right, without any form of communication whatsoever. Thus, damaging the importance of communication itself. It can therefore be questioned how authentic and serious these relationships really are and if the app is capable of creating meaningful, trustworthy, long lasting relationships. A new study by the American Psychological Association found that users of Tinder, mainly college students, had lower levels of self-esteem in comparison to people who did not use the dating app. Mandy Oaklander describes how the results show Tinder users were 'less satisfied with their faces and looks and were more ashamed of their bodies." (2016) Oaklander continues to explain how researchers found people on Tinder were 'more likely to think of themselves as sexual objects' (2016) comparing their appearances to other people regularly, all of which are very damaging to an individuals mental health. Therefore, consequently further affecting interpersonal communication skills due to them feeling unsatisfied with their relationships and themselves, leading to the avoidance of social face to face situations.

Alongside romantic relationships, formal relationships are also another important aspect of an individual's life, whether this is in an interview or communicating with work colleagues. Younger

generations will undoubtedly struggle when it comes to finding and upholding a job, due to the effects of social media on their interpersonal communication. A number of employers value skills such as an individual's ability to work in a team and communication skills. Both of which can be affected in a negative way due to social media overuse. However, there is opportunities for young people to thrive in many careers due to there being a radical shift in the working environment, with technological skills being desirable within the workplace. Many employers/employees may also have opportunity to work from home due to new technologies and social media, thus placing less value on interpersonal communication within their career.

The ability to form and sustain positive relationships is an important part of a person's life, these relationships could be both romantic and platonic. A study conducted by Miller et al, 2016 showed how different nations across the globe formed relationships with other people online, taking into consideration the major rise of social media. An interesting result of this study was the people of Trinidad suggesting that social media has enhanced visibility of people's lives and allows strangers as well as friends to potentially see a ‘more truthful’ representation when compared to real life offline observations. This in turn would allow a person to want to befriend a second person more after seeing their online interactions as it would be believed to be an individuals authentic personality rather than the persona they are presenting to the world once they are offline. This is contrasted by the original idea of the study that suggested there was a moral panic stemming around the notion of individuals being ‘inauthentic and shallow’ when creating online relationships and engaging in forms of communication online. (Miller et al,2016). It could be argued that it becomes easier for people to communicate via social media due to the absence of non-verbal communication.An individual is able to create their own version of themselves to present to the world, in essence you can be whoever you want to be behind a screen whether this is in an authentic or inauthentic way.

Creating a false personal representation online to entice individuals to converse with is not an unheard of thing to do, it stems from the theory of attraction. There are several reasons why people prefer the company of others who have similar attributes and attitudes to their own, especially important attitudes (Berscheid and Walster 1969; Byrne 1971). Similar attitudes provides the notion that an individual is not alone in his or her belief; people often search of others with a similar viewpoint to enable the creation of the sense of being correct in their way of thinking, allowing a growth of confidence.Further possible reasons suggested as to why individuals prefer others who are likelinded to themselves include; knowledge of similar attitudes will enable that individual to predict others’ future behaviors, for example knowing their own reactions to certain situations will allow them to have intuitive knowledge of how another person will react. This in future will enable them to either continue or divert away from an event. Following on from this there is a higher chance of a person assuming there is a higher possibility of an individual being attracted to them, a “likeness begets liking” explanation. In fact people may choose to associate with certain others because they have similar personalities. For example friends are more likely to share personality traits than non friends and those non friends are more likely to become friends if they do share common interests. Moreover, marital partners share more similar personalities than people in randomly assigned pairs, this suggests the notion of personality similarity playing a key role in not only the formation of relationships but also the continuity as shown in examples of marital happiness and longevity (Berscheid and Walster 1969; Byrne 1971).

In addition to the previous study many researchers, such as Milton Rosenbaum created a study in 1986, have suggested that attitudinal dissimilarity, rather than attitudinal similarity, drives the

attraction of individuals. According to the ‘dissimilarity repulsion’ way of thinking a person's motivation to avoid social interactions with others dissimilar to them is stronger than, or at least as strong as, a person's desire to affiliate with like-minded individuals. While a study conducted in 2000 by Ramadhar Singh and Soo Yan Ho revealed that, in certains situations and under certain circumstances, the influence of attitudinal similarity and dissimilarity may apply equivalent and opposite effects on liking. Further in some cases, dissimilar attitudes may have a stronger influence on interpersonal attraction than similar attitudes (Singh and Ho 2000).In summary similarity-attraction theory attempts to explain and predict interpersonal liking by asserting that people are attracted to others who are similar to themselves. Consistent with this view, research has revealed that people prefer to affiliate with those who share similar attitudes, personalities, physical attributes, and a host of other characteristics compared to others who do not.

Taking all of this into consideration it shows how a person is able to manipulate their communications online to benefit themselves and their own relationships despite them not being truly real. However a person would easily become consumed in their online persona and this may start to affect their offline relationships as it would differ hugely to the comfort of their self constructed personality they are presenting online. On the flip side also easy to fall into the trap of trusting and forming a relationship with an individual online after due to sharing common interests, this links back to the idea of moral panic stated by Miller et Al and creates a fear of deception and the ability of manipulation when involving in online communications. This is a factor which should be considered when debating the benefits of social media interactions over real life interactions.

In conclusion, social media has both positive and negative effects on interpersonal communication. It allows us to communicate with a variety of people, engaging in different cultures. In addition, it helps to give people a platform to express themselves if they are unable to do so in face to face situations. However, it risks damaging our interpersonal communication skills and can have a negative effect on individuals mental health and their offline relationships. This is due to the fact that people invest the majority of their time into their online lives and isolate themselves from reality, causing them to struggle with interpersonal communication. The most significant factor is self representation and self esteem. Social media allows us to portray the best version of ourselves, resulting in an unrealistic persona. Furthermore, this also harms our self esteem due to comparison to others and not feeling good enough for societies standard, leading to a lack of confidence when it comes to communicating in the offline world.