

To unplug or not to unplug:
Learning the social media habits of adults

by

Courtenay M. Wills

B.S., Missouri Western State University, 2002
M.A., Missouri State University, 2004

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Department of Educational Leadership
College of Arts and Sciences

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2022

Abstract

The personal and business use of social media (SM) has increased rapidly in the past decade. Many research studies suggest a connection between this increased use of social media and the damage to mental and physical health and, therefore, encourage a practice of regularly unplugging from technology to relieve the damage done by social media. Based in phenomenological inquiry, this study examined the lived experiences of four adult women who unplugged from social media for two weeks and journal about the entire experience. More specifically, by applying self-regulated learning and storytelling, this study looks at the three-phase self-regulated unplugging process of the research participants (forethought, performance, and self-reflection) discovered by Zimmerman (1986). The research identified six themes related to adult's use of social media and sheds light on the potential benefits for adults to regularly unplug from social media. Findings suggest that unplugging from social media has several personal and mental benefits for working adults. Recommendations for future research studies are proposed.

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Approved by:

Major Professor
Dr. Haijun Kang

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Acknowledgements

First, giving all praises and honor to God. I am thankful to You for giving me the strength, knowledge, ability, and opportunity to undertake this study and complete it satisfactorily.

Words cannot express my gratitude for the chair of my committee, Dr. Haijun Kang. Thank you for your patience and feedback. You were always willing to look at another draft to ensure I was on the correct path and I really appreciate the time and effort that took. I am also deeply indebted to my committee for the time and effort you have put into serving on my committee. Thank you for providing your knowledge and expertise throughout this process and thank you for your support!

Special thanks to my immediate family. Thank you for everything from paying for a class to praying with me before my defense. I love you all unconditionally.

I am also grateful to my family, friends, and Sorors for your unwavering support, understanding, and words of encouragement. You will never know how your words of encouragement and faith in my abilities kept me motivated until the end of this project.

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my deceased family members who believed in me but could not be here to see the end result. I love and miss you all.

Myles & Rosa Anderson

Rubie Anderson

Charles Bigham

Thresse Smith

Otis Stith

Arthur Long

Carl Long

Timothy & Elizabeth Wills

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Social media affects our lives tremendously on a daily basis, from spending hours on different social media platforms to viewing content posted by people we may not even know, to creating friendships through a computer. Social media's original purpose was to connect people be they in the same town or worlds away. This is mainly because the internet offers cheap and convenient ways of communication and broadens the access to communities of people with common interests. The internet represents a limitless space where people can meet, interact and overcome physical space limitations (Vosner et al., 2014). Nevertheless, research shows that social media can give the user feelings of isolation and disconnectedness (Regan et al., 2012). Although some users report feelings of loneliness, other users cultivate relationships online with people who have similar interests. There is no limit to the amount of people you can connect with through social media as it continues to become integrated into people's everyday life.

As social media becomes more popular and more apps are created, it is expected that the amount of time spent on social media will continue to grow. According to *Global Social Media Statistics* (2022) social media user numbers have continued to grow with 190 million new users joining social media since October 2021. That equates to annualized growth of 4.2 percent, at an average rate of 6 new users *every single second*. Additionally, according to a survey conducted by Statista conducted in February 2021, nearly half of the respondents stated that on average they spent five to six hours on their phone on a daily basis, not including work-related smartphone use (Ceci, 2022). Moreover, Pew Research Center reports seven-in-ten adults are Facebook users – and around six-in-ten adults use Instagram and Snapchat and visit these sites at least once a day (2020). This increase in use has also led to personal decisions to unplug and remove themselves from social media.

This chapter discusses the development and popularization of social media, how social media platforms are used today, and why it is important to research social media and related topics. In addition, this chapter outlines the research questions, provides a brief overview of self-regulated learning, discusses the significance and the limitations of this study, and provides definitions of common terms referenced throughout the study.

Background

Social media (SM) came into existence 25 years ago in 1997 with the launch of Six Degrees. A user of SixDegrees.com could set up a profile page, create lists of connections, and send messages within networks. Users could send messages and post bulletin board items to others in first, second, and third-degree connections as well (Nafis, 2021). Today, social media is a term that is broadly used to describe any number of technological systems related to collaboration and community (Joosten, 2012). Although the definition is short, social media is usually described by example. There are several types of social media including but not limited to: social networking sites (SNS), blogs, wikis, multi-media platforms, virtual game worlds, and virtual social worlds. Specific examples of social media (based on popularity) include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, YouTube, Instagram and Pinterest. Research conducted by Aichner et al. (2021) presented the results of a review of literature that identifies, “the most quoted and dominant definitions of social media and alternative terms that were used between 1994 and 2019 to identify their major applications” (p. 215). The chart (see Table 1) was provided to give context to how researchers have defined social media for 25 years. The article goes on to explain, “when reading an article about SM, it is essential to understand how the researchers defined SM and how results from articles that use different definitions can be compared” (Aichner et al., 2021, p. 215).

Table 1:*Social Media Definitions with Author Names and Source*

Year	Definition	Authors	Source
1996	When computer networks link people as well as machines, they become social networks, which we call computer-supported social networks (CSSNs).	Wellman	Annual Review of Sociology
1997	When a computer network connects people or organizations, it is a social network . Just as a computer network is a set of machines connected by a set of cables, a social network is a set of people (or organizations or other social entities) connected by a set of social relationships, such as friendship, co-working, or information exchange.	Garton et al	Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication
1999	Virtual communities are defined by bringing people together with a common set of needs or interests. Those needs or interests could span a variety of dimensions. Virtual communities could be organized around an area of interest (such as sports or stock investments), a demographic segment (certain age groups within the population), or a geographic region (metropolitan areas).	Hagel	Journal of Interactive Marketing
2002	Virtual communities can be defined as groups of people with common interests and practices that communicate regularly and for some duration in an organized way over the Internet through a common location or mechanism. The location of the virtual community, although not physical, is important because it establishes the virtual “place” where the members meet. This location or mechanism may be a chatroom, bulletin board, or listserv e-mail program.	Ridings et al.	Journal of Strategic Information Systems
2005	SNSs [social networking services] are designed specifically to facilitate user interaction for a variety of goals, mainly dating, business networking, and promotion.	Marwick	Conference: Association of Internet Res. 6.0
2006	At the most basic level, an online social network is an Internet community where individuals interact, often through profiles that (re)present their public persona (and their networks of connections) to others.	Acquisti and Gross	Conference: Privacy Enhancing Technologies (PET)
2007	Social network sites are web-based services that allow individuals to (a) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (b) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (c) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.	Boyd and Ellison	Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication

2008	Social networking sites typically provide users with a profile space, facilities for uploading content (e.g., photos, music), messaging in various forms, and the ability to make connections to other people.	Joinson	Conference: Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems
2009	Social network sites provide a public forum that enables the exchange of digital information, such as pictures, videos, text, blogs, and hyperlinks between users with common interests, such as hobbies, work, school, family, and friendship.	Sledgianowski and Kulviwat	Journal of Computer Information Systems
2010	Social media is a group of Internet-based applications that builds on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content.	Kaplan and Haenlein	Business Horizons
2011	Social media is a honeycomb of seven functional building blocks: identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups.	Kietzmann et al.	
2012	Social networking sites can be defined as virtual collections of user profiles that can be shared with others.	Hughes et al.	Computers in Human Behavior
2013	A social network site is a networked communication platform in which participants (a) have uniquely identifiable profiles that consist of user-supplied content, content provided by other users, and/or system-level data; (b) can publicly articulate connections that can be viewed and traversed by others; and (c) can consume, produce, and/or interact with streams of user-generated content provided by their connections on the site.	Ellison and Boyd	Book: The Oxford Handbook of Internet Studies
2015	Social media are Internet-based, disentrained, and persistent channels of masspersonal communication facilitating perceptions of interactions among users, deriving value primarily from user-generated content.	Carr and Hayes	Atlantic Journal of Communication
2016	Social media is the colonization of the space between traditional broadcast and private dyadic communication, providing people with a scale of group size and degrees of privacy that we have termed “scalable sociality.”	Miller et al.	Book: How the World Changed Social Media
2018	Social media is made up of various user-driven platforms that facilitate diffusion of compelling content, dialogue creation, and communication to a broader audience. It is essentially a digital space created by the people and for the people, and it provides an environment that is conducive for interactions and networking to occur at different levels (for instance, personal, professional, business, marketing, political, and societal).	Kapoor et al.	Information Systems Frontiers
2019	Social media is any online resource that is designed to facilitate engagement between individuals.	Bishop	Book: Consumer Informatics and Digital Health

Note. The table was adapted from “Twenty-Five Years of Social Media: A Review of Social Media Applications and Definitions from 1994 to 2019” by T. Aichner, M. Grünfelder, O. Maurer and D. Jegeni, 2021 (<https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/10.1089/cyber.2020.0134>). Copyright 2021 by Cyberpsychology, Behavior and Social Networking.

There are numerous social media venues. Twitter is a social media site that is often referred to as a microblogging site due to the limit of 280 characters with each post (it was originally 160 characters when it began 2006). However, the limited amount that a user can share also increases the traffic to Twitter. The average blogger may update every few days whereas the average microblogger will update several times a day (Java et al., 2007). LinkedIn is a professional network that is centered around business contacts. (“LinkedIn About Us”, 2022). Users can maintain a list of contacts with similar professional interests that they can professionally collaborate. Another popular site, Instagram is a social media site that tells the user’s story through photography and videos. In 2020, Instagram had over 1 billion active monthly users, 500 million active daily users and 995 photos were uploaded per second (Aslam, 2020). By far, Facebook is the most popular of all social media sites it was reported that Facebook had 2.7 billion monthly active users as of October 2020 (Clement, 2020). The use of Facebook can be different depending on the user as there are many features of this social networking site. Using Facebook, users can send messages, add friends, update personal profiles, join groups, develop applications, host content, and learn about other users through their online profiles, among others (Haase, 2010). Facebook is a way to connect with family, old friends, and co-workers while creating and cultivating new relationships as well.

The demographics of social media is also another important aspect to analyze because it is being used by all ages and classes. According to Pew Research Center (2022), in 2021, YouTube and Facebook continue to dominate the social media world with 81% and 69%

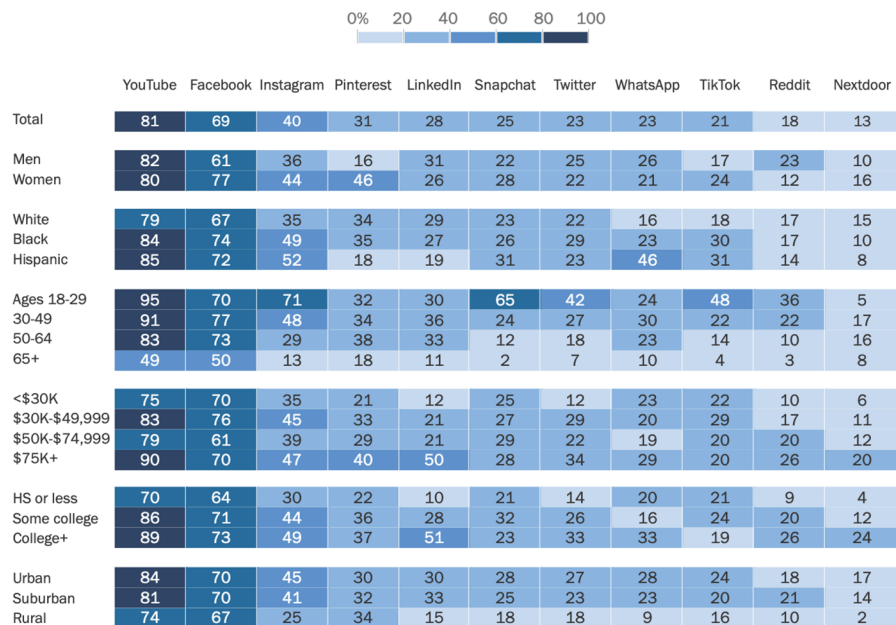
reporting ever using the site. While YouTube and Reddit were the only two platforms measured that saw significant growth since the last time the survey was published in 2019. Figure 1 shows a breakdown of the usage by social media platform, gender, race, age, income, education, and location.

Figure 1:

Adults who use Social Media by Demographic Information

Use of online platforms, apps varies – sometimes widely – by demographic group

% of U.S. adults in each demographic group who say they ever use ...



Note: White and Black adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race. Not all numerical differences between groups shown are statistically significant (e.g., there are no statistically significant differences between the shares of White, Black or Hispanic Americans who say they use Facebook). Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 25-Feb. 8, 2021.

"Social Media Use in 2021"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Note. The figure was created from "Social Media Use in 2021" by B. Auxier and M. Anderson, 2021

(<https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2021/04/07/social-media-use-in-2021/>). Copyright 2021 by Pew Research Center.

Statement of the Problem

As social media continues to develop and offer more platforms, one would assume the total time spent on these sites would continue to grow. However, a phone survey of American adults completed in 2012 revealed that 61% of Facebook users had voluntarily taken a break from using Facebook for a period of several weeks or more at some point in the past (Foot, 2014, p. 1314). Foot (2014) also found twenty percent of adult internet users who are not currently on Facebook said they previously used the site. The reasons they provided for the decline included too much time consumed, too little privacy and too much gossip. Outside of that, the users who have never been on Facebook play an important role in the unplugging phenomenon as well. “Most significantly, the survey found that one-third of online adults in the US were not using Facebook. Of that group, 92% were not interested in becoming Facebook users” (Foot, 2014, p. 1314). Not wanting to connect at all speaks to the resistance against social media and the personal choice to stay disconnected. Although a portion of these adults may be using other Social Networking Sites (SNS) these findings suggest that pushback against social media is a significant social phenomenon (Foot, 2014). Besides refusing to become members, another way that people are pushing back against social media is by unplugging from social media. Morris and Cravens Pickens (2017) defines unplugging as, “disconnecting from certain types of technology or digital media.”

Social media is a phenomenon in itself; it has changed how people communicate, interact, and gain information. Unplugging and/or removing yourself from social media can affect your personal and professional relationships as some people only use social media to announce various life events. A study by Vosner et al. (2014) looked at the frequency of computer usage by gender, education, and living environment. The study found out that those

three characteristics are the most important factors (directly or indirectly) on the use of online social networks by active older internet users. Participants also noted that using the internet helps them stay in touch with their families and they feel more connected and less lonely (Vosner et al., 2014).

Latib et al. (2014) created a honeycomb model where they covered the more functional areas of the social network. The model lists the main functions of Facebook as: creation of personal identity; content sharing; communication with friends and family; creating personal reputations, forming interest groups; constant monitoring of new information; and the development of personal, friendly, and business relations (p. 291). Other than those social purposes, Facebook also offers daily entertainment such as playing games, watching videos, allowing one to express their thoughts and keeping updated about what is happening within one's social circle (Sharma et al., 2016).

However, users who initially embraced constant connectivity are now “pushing back,” looking for ways to resist being permanently connected and contactable. “Pushback” is a growing phenomenon among frequent technology users seeking to regain control, establish boundaries, resist information overload and establish greater personal life balance. A study conducted by Morrison and Gomez (2014) identified five primary motivations and behaviors related to the pushback. The behaviors identified can come from a variety of factors. “Primary pushback motivations comprise of emotional dissatisfaction, external values, taking control, addiction and privacy,” (p. 13). It has become common to see someone post that they are taking a break from Facebook due to the lack of privacy, negativity and lurking that occurs.

A study conducted by a research firm indicates that there is a growing unease with several aspects of social media. The concerns over loss of privacy have increased as social media participation grew (Hickey, 2011). The author explains that, "Americans are more worried about their privacy being violated online than they are about terrorist attacks, losing their jobs or bankruptcy" (para. 1). Hickey asserts that the main objection to using social media can be divided into three categories: (1) a belief that social media might be a waste of time; (2) the perception of social media platforms as confusing or intimidating; and (3) concerns about blurring social and professional identities. Overall, this growth of pushback and self-distancing on social media draws a connection to self-regulated learning as users are starting to monitor their time on social media.

Self-regulated learning (SRL) is a never-ending process in the life of a learner. Bandura (1986) defines SRL as an interaction of personal, behavioral, and environmental triadic processes. According to Boekaerts, et al. (2005) "Self-regulation refers to self-generated thoughts, feelings, and actions that are planned and cyclically adapted to the attainment of personal goals," (p. 14). In literature, SRL has been applied widely to social media in a variety of ways. A study by Uzun and Kilis (2019), which focused on the relationship between media and technology use, academic performance, multi-tasking and self-regulation influence on each other, found that only media and technology usage significantly and negatively contributed to the prediction of students' academic performance, while multitasking and control of self-regulation did not. Another study done by Pintrich (2004) created a conceptual framework for assessing student motivation and self-regulated learning in the college classroom. The framework is based on a self-regulatory (SRL) perspective on student motivation and learning in contrast to a student's approach to learning (SAL) perspective. Pintrich (2004) proposed a model of self-

regulation that provides a conceptual model of college student motivation and regulation of academic learning in hopes to provide guidance and support for the validity of assessment instruments such as self-report questionnaires and other types of measures of self-regulated learning. Lastly, an article by Dabbagh and Kitsantas (2012) approached integrating formal and informal learning using social media and supporting student self-regulated learning in higher education contexts. Overall, the goal of the research was to conceptualize the connection between personal learning environments, social media, and self-regulated learning. Dabbagh and Kitsantas (2011) found that teaching students to effectively use SRL may help them gain basic and complex management skills; however, not all students have the skills to effectively use social media in education. With this growing phenomenon of pushback, there is minimal literature that connects the core ideas found in SRL, and there is a logical need to connect it to pushback.

Foot (2014) looked at five distinct desires as the primary reasons for pushback such as abstaining altogether, practicing time-bounds or reducing use in other ways. The five desires were (1) the desire for downtime, (2) the desire for more face-to-face relationships, (3) the desire to create a space for one's kids to enjoy traditional childhood activities, (4) the desire to reduce time spent on attention-seeking online noise and (5) the desire to retain or restore a sense of privacy. People are becoming addicted to social media from being constantly connected (Zhao & Zhou, 2021; Schivinski, 2020). Ultimately, they are also becoming unhealthy by constantly being plugged in and connected to their devices (Haynes, 2021).

There are also numerous negative results of spending too much time on social media. A study by Schivinski et al. (2020) looked at excessive and problematic social media use (PSMU)

within adults. The results from the study revealed that intrapersonal motive, negative affect, relationship maintenance, and psychological well-being were the strongest correlates of PSMU. Furthermore, excessive and problematic users also presented decreased levels of psychological well-being and self-esteem in comparison to non-problematic users (p. 6). Another study by Thomas et al. (2016) used a mixed-methods design to test whether a correlation existed between social media usage and loneliness along with other feelings while unplugging. The results showed that the higher someone scored on loneliness, the more negative feelings they reported. Previous research (Brandtzaeg, 2012) proved that lonely people are more likely to use social media although at times it makes them feel lonelier and more isolated.

A documentary directed by Jeff Orlowski entitled, *The Social Dilemma*, explored the dangerous human impact of social networking, with tech experts sounding the alarm on their own creations. The people that they spoke with were social media trailblazers in their own right, former presidents of Google, Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest, the co-inventor of the Facebook “like” button, former director of engagement at Facebook - just to name a few. Not only were they able to make the decisions to help social media grow into what it is today, they were also aware of the flip side of the coin. The documentary discussed the effects that social media had by influencing the culture and our world, promoting fake news, and the psychological and emotional effects of it. “You get rewarded by hearts, likes, thumbs up and we conflate that with value and we conflate that with truth,” said Chamath Palihapitiya, former VP of Growth at Facebook (Rhodes & Orlowski, 2020, 0:39:20). The documentary discussed the rise in depression, anxiety, and specifically how so many teens were dissatisfied with the way they look. The director even touched briefly on social media dysmorphia, a disorder where you want to look more like your filtered selfie. Alex Roetter, former Senior VP of Engineering at Twitter

went on to say that, “These things, you release them and they take on a life of their own. And how they are used is pretty different than you expected. I always felt like it was a force for good. I do not know if I feel that way anymore” (Rhodes & Orlowski, 2020, 0:2:49). Social media has changed the way that we connect and view each other, and the way we interact.

The film delved deep and looked at the science behind the algorithm and how everything people did the Internet and social media was connected. “A lot of people think that Google is just a search box and Facebook is just a place where I can see what my friends are doing,” said Tristan Harris, former Google Design Ethicist & Co-founder of the Center for Humane Technology. “What they don’t realize is there is a whole team of engineers whose job is to use your psychology against you” (Rhodes & Orlowski, 2020, 0:13:22). The predictive advertising embedded within social media is a major complaint of a lot of users. Social media sites track your history, what interests you and what keeps you engaged. Overall, this documentary helps us consider the growing fears and hesitations for people engaging in social media, and yet another reason for the growth of this pushback phenomenon.

The gap in research that this study addressed is the lack of information pertaining to the act of unplugging and the lived experiences of the participants during and after unplugging. Another gap found within the literature is the lack of available research on the subject. While completing literature review on social media unplugging phenomenon, I was unable to find extensive research using the search term “unplug” and “unplugging.” Due to this, additional words like resistance, media resistance, push back, and media refusal were used to find literature. I used the term “unplugging” throughout this research, since it is the most current and common term used, but my research encompassed all the terms listed.

In conclusion, this research helps build on this literature in unique ways, particularly since there is minimal social media research on push back and unplugging that also considers a framework for self-regulated learning. Furthermore, few studies look at these components (push back, unplugging, social media, and SRL) through a phenomenological lens focused on bringing forward the deeper stories and perspectives of people who choose to push back and unplug. Therefore, this study works to explore the essence of individuals' lived experiences as they engage in self-regulation through the process of pushing back and unplugging from social media. It also focuses on what it feels like for a participant to move through forethought to performance to self-reflection through in-depth interviews.

Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore how adults experience the act of “push back” through the process of unplugging from social media as it relates to the three phases of self-regulated learning: forethought, performance and self-reflection (Zimmerman, 2009). The research questions were:

RQ 1: In what ways do the participants experience unplugging as it relates to the forethought phase of self-regulated learning?

RQ 2: In what ways do the participants experience unplugging as it relates to the performance phase of self-regulated learning?

RQ 3: In what ways do the participants experience unplugging as it relates to the self-reflection phase of self-regulated learning?

Methods

This was a hermeneutical phenomenological study. According to Bhattacharya (2017), “In this type of phenomenology, language, conversations, one’s historical context, understanding, and interacting with the cultural elements are where the researcher focuses” (p. 100). This is done because one’s interpretation or textual meaning can differ depending on the culture, history or meaning associated with it. At its inception, hermeneutical phenomenology was used in the interpretation of texts focusing on language and communication. Most recently, it has expanded to look at multimedia data, which benefited this study since it will focus on information from surveys, interviews and journaling.

With hermeneutical phenomenology as a larger overarching framework, this study used Zimmerman’s (2009) framework for self-regulated learning as a content level framework guiding data collection and analysis. Zimmerman’s (2009) framework consists of the three phases of self-regulated learning: forethought, performance and self-reflection. This is a phenomenological study that uses SRL (Zimmerman, 1986) as a content level framework informing the research design. Edmund Husserl is credited as the father of phenomenology (Crotty, 1996, p. 28). Phenomenology concentrates on the experience of the participant. Bhattacharya (2017) confirms by saying

One of the key originating ideas of phenomenology is that if we had experienced a phenomenon in our past, as we recall our experiences, then perhaps we can find possibilities for new ways of understanding those experiences through making new meanings and gaining new insights (p. 64).

This study looked at the experiences of people who had decided to unplug from social media. Their insight provided supporting evidence, opportunities and challenges in incorporating social media into higher education. Zacharakis (2014) further describes, “phenomenology then is not designed to develop theories or universal models. Instead, it is used in each event to examine each premise and assumption in order to understand the essence of the event” (p. 3).

The best way to gain information for this study was from interviewing adults on their experiences and interactions with social media, explore their perspectives, and lived experiences. The qualitative interview is a critical element in a phenomenological study. “Qualitative interviews are used when researchers want to gain in-depth knowledge from participants about particular phenomena, experiences, or sets of experiences” (deMarris & Lapan, 2003, p. 52). In addition, asking open-ended questions and reflective journaling gives the participant an opportunity to provide their lived experiences during and after unplugging.

Coding is another method used in qualitative research to identify passages and find a connection between them. Saldaña (2016) explains “A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (p. 3). Data can include interview transcripts, participant field notes, journals, documents, photographs, video, websites, and e-mail correspondence just to name a few. Saldaña (2016) goes on to declare that the coding that happens from the first interview might need to be reevaluated and possibly reconfigured once the codes from the second interview are developed.

In addition to open-ended interviews, journaling was completed by both the participants and the researcher. Participants were made aware that journaling could include written notes, word documents, recordings of themselves (i.e. video diary) and/or a voice recording.

Furthermore, keeping a personal researcher journal added transparency as a researcher. My journal was used to document thoughts, patterns, follow-up questions and explore additional subjects. Trustworthiness in qualitative research was outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and includes credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability and authenticity. While conducting the study, I followed credibility, confirmability and transferability by debriefing, auditing and triangulation. To build on those criteria, an article by Tracy (2010) provided an eight-point conceptualization of qualitative quality that includes worthy topic, rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethics and meaningful coherence. It is important to note that these eight markers can be applied to a variety of fields and crafts.

The participants for this research were a group of adults of similar demographic makeup. Dibley et al. (2020) wrote about random sampling selections and how introducing multiple variables would confuse the results and create a low chance of people experiencing the same thing. Each participant removed themselves from all social media accounts for two weeks. To recruit participants, I contacted people who have taken a break from social media in the past. The idea was if they unplugged from social before, they would have a willingness to remove themselves from social media, which is important for participation in the project. Three rounds of one-on-one interviews through Zoom were conducted: (1) prior to the study; (2) after two weeks of unplugging; and (3) one month after unplugging and returning to social media accounts. The purpose of this research was to explore how adults experience the act of “push back” through the process of unplugging from social media as it relates to the three phases of self-regulated learning: forethought, performance and self-reflection. In addition, the participants were asked to journal their feelings and observations while using social media, during the hiatus and after returning.

Relevance and Significance

This study is important because there is scarcity of research focusing on the benefits and/or negative effects that unplugging has on an adult socially and professionally. Although there is a strong movement of people unplugging, few studies (Foot, 2014; Morrison et al., 2014; Woodstock, 2014) have even addressed unplugging or show the history of social media pushback. In addition, there has not been a study with a series of interviews in stages with participants that address the effects of unplugging over a period of time. On a personal level, having information on how much social media affects our mood and outlook is important. Of course, having this information would be beneficial and helpful for all so they can make informed decisions about how much time to spend on social media, but the lack of research in this field leaves everyone at a disadvantage. By addressing the need to unplug, adults can decide if social media is something that they want to continue to incorporate into their life or they should unplug themselves from it.

Research has looked at the ways to incorporate social media into the classroom, but there has been little done to look at the resistance from the perspective of everyday people, students (traditional and non-traditional), faculty and institutions. Why are so many people getting away from constantly being connected and how will it eventually affect the integration of social media into higher education classrooms? By addressing the need to unplug, educational institutions can decide if social media is something that they want to incorporate.

Subjectivity Statement

As my proposed research involves examining unplugging, and how this process affects lived experiences, it is important I address my own subjectivity within this study. This is also one of the important steps in conducting qualitative research as it helps understand potential bias.

As a user of social media for over 30 years, I think that it is important to study the effects of social media, the benefits of unplugging, as well as the way both issues affect adults. I have only had positive experiences with social media, the way I interpret the results can still be affected by my values or beliefs. Bhattacharya (2017) describes subjectivity as subject positions, “each of these positions is connected to specific discourses of what it means for you to be connected to those labels, or subject positions,” (p. 35). Throughout life you acquire opinions about different concepts due to your role or position in life at a certain time.

As a researcher, you should understand those beliefs as they relate to your research. As a user, I understand that social media is a communication platform and a way to communicate with people from different times in your life. However, knowing that it is entertainment I treat it as such. I have not had any relationships that were ruined by social media; but I have seen it happen before. Knowing this, allows me to be aware of my biases so they do not reflect in my analysis when collecting and coding results.

Peshkin (1988) believes, “If researchers are informed about the qualities that have emerged during their research, they can at least disclose to their readers where self and subject became joined.” He goes on to state that when that happens the researcher should write “unshackled” from that orientation that was interfering in the research process (p. 17). It is important to look for those possible positions because they ultimately affect the way you make meaning of your research. “Qualitative researchers tend to be transparent about values, beliefs and assumptions in which they operate and how such things interact and inform their studies,” (Bhattacharya, p. 36).

In regards to my own subjectivity, I have been on social media for the last 20+ years connecting with old friends, making new friends, updating statuses and sharing my life and opinions with anyone who I have been connected to online. I started social media back in 1999 when I had a page on a popular site, Blackplanet. Since then, I was also one of the early users of Facebook (back when you had to have a school account to access the site). During that time, I have reconnected with family members, childhood friends and former classmates, but it has also given me a way to meet people who have similar interests or hobbies. I have made lifelong friends just by connecting with people online. Social media also gives you a direct connection to companies, celebrities and in some cases – fame and fortune. I truly enjoy social media and see the benefits of it. I use it daily and currently run several personal and business accounts.

All social media is not bad, but over the years I have noticed that people in my environment talk and interact less in person. Over time, people seem to have started to prefer posting a photo to show the great time that they are having instead of actually having a good time. Public opinion is also something that is more important than it was before. I have personally heard people say that they cannot repeat an outfit because they were seen in it previously on social media. It is important to note that this is an unrealistic expectation but multiple people share it. I have also seen people attacked for information that they personally decided to share on social media; however, the golden rule of social media is if you post it online, there is always a possibility of backlash or public opinion. It has become so popular that sites now give you the option to disable your comments. In addition, terms like “online bully,” “troll,” and “keyboard gangster” were created for users who might not “say” those same things to you verbally if they were in person. Furthermore, while working in higher education and consistently working with high school student; I have noticed a change in socialization,

communication and overall activity. Once I started to notice these things, I also noticed that terms like “unplugging” and “quitting social media” were becoming more mainstream. I started seeing articles and news stories about putting down your phone and enjoying life.

Naturally, I wondered why there was such a change in opinion; like anything else, there are always benefits and disadvantages. Yet, as more and more apps are introduced, there has been more and more focus on the effects of social media. People are starting to become overwhelmed with trying to keep up with the newest application. That is when I started reading and researching social media pushback and became aware of the National Day of Unplugging. As I started to read more, I discovered that social media could really affect your overall physical, mental and emotional health. It was around that time that I noticed that friends and acquaintances were removing themselves from social media. When I inquired about the reasons, I heard things like, “I can get more done when I’m not distracted” or “I woke up checking my phone and I would check it until I went to bed” and “It’s a total waste of time.”

As I conducted this research, it was presumed that I would find a variety of results. I believe unplugging is something everyone can do for life balance and mental health. On the other hand, I was curious to see if the participants could actually unplug for two weeks. After researching, I have found that it is common for someone to seemingly quit but later admit that they snuck online while taking part in unplugging. I was also curiously eager to learn about other people’s experiences, how long it would take before you are okay with being unplugged from social media and to see if there are common themes while they unplugged.

Assumptions & Limitations

It is assumed that the participants will actually unplug, give me honest and truthful answers in the interviews, and that the journal responses are a true reflection of how they are feeling. The participants are volunteers who may withdraw from the study at any time and with no ramifications. It is also expected that the participants have a genuine interest in participating in the research and have no ulterior motives for assisting. Lastly, it is assumed that the screening questions asked (Appendix C) are appropriate and ensures that the reporting process is similar for all involved with the study.

Due to the limited amount of time and money given to complete this study, one of the limitations of this study is that the participants were chosen by convenience sampling. Due to this, there is a chance that the sample chosen would not apply to a broader group of participants. In addition, they might not follow the parameters around unplugging and the guidelines set for this research.

Operational Definitions

Better-Less: a group of discontents who used to be euphoric embracers of the opportunities of technological connectivity, but who are now looking for ways to push back and resist, to manage or reduce their use and perceived dependence on technology (Morrison et al., 2014).

Digital Divide: The term "digital divide" refers to the gap between individuals, households, businesses and geographic areas at different socio-economic levels with regard to both their opportunities to access information and communication technologies (ICTs) and to their use of the Internet for a wide variety of activities (Digital Divide, 2006)

Evertime: The expectation of constant availability (Morrison & Gomez, 2014)

Ever-Wasers: people who claim nothing has really changed and insist innovation is really nothing new (Morrison et al., 2014)

Facebook: Originally founded in 2004 as Facebook, Meta's mission is to give people the power to build community and bring the world closer together. Our products empower more than 3 billion people around the world to share ideas, offer support and make a difference (Meta's FAQs 2022).

Instagram: Instagram is a free photo and video sharing app available on iPhone and Android. People can upload photos or videos to our service and share them with their followers or with a select group of friends. They can also view, comment and like posts shared by their friends on Instagram. Anyone 13 and older can create an account by registering an email address and selecting a username ("What is Instagram", 2022).

LinkedIn: A popular social web site, a professional network that is centered around business contacts. This site recently has 875 million members in 200 countries and regions worldwide ("LinkedIn About Us", 2022)

Lurking: A strategic technique used by social media users to maintain the privacy of their personal information while still connected to social media platforms (Osatuyi, 2015, p. 324)

Pinterest: Pinterest is a visual discovery engine for finding ideas like recipes, home and style inspiration, and more. When you discover Pins you love, save them to boards to keep your ideas organized and easy to find. You can also create Pins to share your ideas with other people

on Pinterest. This site has 400+ million active users and 240 billion pins have been saved by Pinners (“Pinterest About Us”, 2022)

Pushback: A growing phenomenon among frequent technology users seeking to regain control, establish boundaries, resist information overload and establish greater personal life balance (Morrison & Gomez, 2014)

Resistance: informants’ purposeful, considered stance and their sense that media constitute an oppressive onslaught to be held in abeyance (Woodstock, 2014)

Self-regulated Learning: “Self-regulated learning (SRL) refers to self-generated thoughts, feelings, and actions that are planned and cyclically adapted to the attainment of personal goals” (Zimmerman, 2000, p. 14)

Time sink (also known as “going down the rabbit hole”): sequentially viewing countless videos or images on the same topic, such as cat videos or artistic food photos.

Twitter: Twitter is a widely used free social networking tool that allows people to share information, in a real-time news feed (Mistry, 2011).

Unplugging: disconnecting from certain types of technology or digital media (Morris & Cravens Pickens, 2017).

YouTube: YouTube is a free video sharing website that makes it easy to watch online videos. You can even create and upload your own videos to share with others. Originally created in 2005, YouTube is now one of the most popular sites on the Web, with visitors watching around 6 billion hours of video every month (YouTube: What is YouTube, 2022)

Chapter Summary

Unplugging is a new term that is getting a lot of exposure due to reports of addiction to cell phones and social media accounts. An addiction to cell phones and social media can decrease production and provides a constant distraction to users. The best way to break the cycle is to unplug from social media and become less dependent on the satisfaction that your phone notifications give you. However, staying “plugged into” social media keeps users in the loop with friends, businesses, news and celebrities and being unplugged can affect relationships.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Although there are several positives of social media, given the focus of this study, this literature review focuses on why people are resisting social media and in turn feel the need to unplug. Since social media resistance is a new phenomenon, there have been limited studies that research the resistance as a whole. This chapter gives a history of the pushback against social media and the attitudes and perceptions of traditional students, non-traditional students and faculty in regard to social media. As expected, while completing the literature review with a focus on adult learners, there was a pattern of pushback within traditional and non-traditional students. Additionally, there was evidence of resistance inside higher education institutions which created the additional topics of faculty resistance and institutional pushback.

Social Media Resistance/Pushback

The study of "media refusal" (Portwood-Stacer, 2013) and "internet resistance" (Woodstock, 2011) are still fairly new and there has been limited research regarding the terms. Portwood-Stacer (2013) defines media refusal as the practice in which people consciously choose not to engage with some media technology or platform. People who enact such a practice are known as 'resisters' or 'rejectors.' Foot (2014) defined pushback to digital media (DM) as "reducing and avoiding media use, altering media practices, and attempting to influence media policies" (p. 1315). Foot's article provided a historical look at pushback across various mediums. The review consisted of texts from "magazine and news websites, blogs, SM industry publications, business forums, civic-oriented websites, government agency sites and other types of online media" (p. 1315). There were only a few instances between 2006-2008 of online texts that warned of the downsides of constant use of social media. Foot noticed a rise in texts between 2009-2011 and deducts that the emergence of pushback was created in this time frame. Other

examples of media refusal include refusing to watch television, refusing to own a mobile phone or the rejection of a particular media platform or media brand (Portwood-Stacer, 2013).

Due to the emergence of the pushback, an organization named Reboot was created by a group of Jewish artists wanting to "reboot" the culture and carve out a weekly day of rest. In March 2010, Reboot held the inaugural National Day of Unplugging which was covered in the national news (Foot, 2014, p. 1328). The event runs for 24 hours on the first Friday of March from sundown to sundown. The event has gained popularity and is now an annual event that is celebrated worldwide. To prepare for the day of unplugging, Reboot created a smartphone application that announces a user's temporary logout to their Twitter and Facebook communities, a cell phone sleeping bag that blocks the glow of your cellphone and a phonekerchief that blocks incoming calls and texts. On its 10th Anniversary, the National Day of Unplugging led over 100,000 people to take the pledge to unplug for 24 hours. In addition, 1,000 'unplugged events' were held from coast to coast and Reboot provided approximately 75,000 cellphone sleeping bags (National Day of Unplugging, 2020).

Morrison et al. (2014) describes the phenomenon as "pushback to connectivity as a reaction against the overload of information and changing relationships brought about by communication technologies such as smart phones, tablets and computers connected to the internet" (p. 1). In 2014, pushback was a relatively new term and within this article, a lot of identifying pushback vocabulary was described. Morrison (2014) explains that the terms that were created by GopNikita (2011) – the Never-Betters, the Ever-Wasers and the Better-Nevers – have changed as rapidly as the technology. A new term was introduced, the Better-Less which is a group of users who are looking to push back by reducing their use and dependence on technology. The term *connectivity pushback* is a reaction from constantly being connected to any

type of communication technology not limited to smart phones, tablets and computers. Another term, *evertime* is explained as the "non-stop expectation of availability" through portable and wearable technologies" (p. 2). The euphoria of being connected can quickly turn to "feelings of saturation, overload and disenfranchisement" (p. 2). These users embraced "the changes that the information age has wrought, these capable and comfortable technology users are now expressing doubt, and looking for ways out" (p. 1). Once the negative feelings towards technology occur, pushback happens and users sometimes take that time to become unconnected.

By using a similar analysis of source materials as Foot (2014), the article identified five different types of motivations for pushback as well as five different types of pushback behavior. The five types of motivation for pushback are: (1) Emotional dissatisfaction; (2) External values; (3) Taking back control; (4) Addiction; and (5) Privacy. Emotional dissatisfaction happens when a user's high expectations of social media are not met or they become unsatisfied. The external values that affect users are usually from political, religious or moral conflicts of the internet. The need to take back control happens when users want to manage their time and energy differently. Users feel as if the technology is "stealing productive time" (p. 8). Older and younger users have both admitted to feelings of addiction when it comes to social media. Lastly, users have a fear of their privacy being violated and constantly being monitored. In the study, emotional dissatisfaction was the most frequently reported reason for the pushback with taking back one's time and energy back was the second most reported.

Morrison et al. (2014) also identified corresponding pushback behaviors as: (1) Behavior adaption; (2) Social agreement; (3) Tech solution; (4) Back to the woods; and (5) No problem. A behavior adaption happens when users manage the amount of time spent on social media, give up one or more applications or complete a digital fasting altogether. A social agreement is when a

group modifies or restricts the way that they use communication technology. Another solution to the overuse of technology is to downgrade your phone, the use of parental controls or blocking of content and/or times of use. The term "back to the woods" describes when someone completely goes offline by adopting severely limited internet usage, barely minimal phone use, or both" (p. 12). Lastly, the no problem behavior is for users who are reacting to pushback by insisting that there is nothing wrong with technology.

Portwood-Stacer (2013) used a qualitative study to look at the resistance among active abstainers of Facebook. Using over 100 web and print publications and personal phone interviews from 20 Facebook abstainers, Portwood-Stacer identified several types of media refusers. The refusers researched range from those who have never had an account before to permanently deleting one's profile or reduced usage and simply ignoring the site altogether. Resistance does not come from ignorance or indifference of the platform but more from the power it seems to hold over their lives. For example, since Facebook is currently the dominant social media platform, not being in touch with some friends via Facebook means missing out on major life events or not being connected to them at all. From the research, it was found that refusal to participate in Facebook may be for those who already have a great deal of social capital, people whose social standing will endure without Facebook and/or people whose livelihoods does not require them to be constantly plugged in. Similar opinions suggest that these technologies detract from more authentic and meaningful face-to-face moments and distract you from more important things, such as education (Westerman et al., 2016).

A study by Chen and Kuo (2017) employed the theory of innovation resistance and summarized 27 factors of barriers encountered by users during the knowledge sharing process of social media. In the study, they utilized the viewpoints of 12 respondents who completed the

questionnaires in a face-to-face setting. The group either had previous experience with social media or were frequent users at the time of the study. The results suggested that the amount of resistance of knowledge sharing on social media was reduced, resulting in seven dimensions of resistance: usage barriers, values barriers, physical risks, trust risks, security belief barriers, mutual benefit belief barriers, and image barriers. This study explored the resistance from individual's social knowledge sharing behaviours and media usage barriers. Analysis of the research results also showed that media and functional barriers affected users' sharing behaviours. If a person is not comfortable with the social media platform, they are less likely to use it. Once consumers find it interesting and beneficial to visit a social platform, they do not hesitate to engage themselves more in social activities. The integration of other media or other network applications can strengthen the effectiveness of the combination of media and reduce the user resistance towards social media.

Student Resistance

Nationally, in fall 2018, 6.9 million students were enrolled in a distance education course at a degree-granting postsecondary institution. Contrary to this continued increase in social media usage, some researchers share concerns that online learning can result in feelings of isolation and disconnectedness for learners (Regan et al., 2012). With so many institutions developing online curriculums, using additional methods to enhance online learning in the classroom will provide mixed methods of instruction for different types of learners. The purpose of social networking activities as an educational tool is to increase communication, interaction in the classroom and make connections with classmates.

With the use of SNSs, a student can participate in groups or communities with similar interests, share study material, videos, or links. A study done by Sharma et al. (2016) obtained

results from structural equation modelling (SEM) that showed that resource sharing is the most influencing determinant in the decision of Facebook usage in higher education, followed by perceived usefulness, perceived enjoyment, collaboration, and social influence. Further, additional results from the same study showed that collaboration is the most important predictor of Facebook adoption for academic purposes followed by resource sharing, perceived enjoyment, social influence, and perceived usefulness.

Manasijevic et al. (2016) researched why students use Facebook and how Facebook can be used for educational activities by looking at student's attitudes and perceptions towards the educational use of Facebook. To do this, 226 students completed 24 questions that were divided into two main parts; student demographic characteristics and experiences, purposes and attitudes of Facebook usage. The results revealed that students use Facebook mainly to stay in contact with friends. As a result, only 23.1% of students believe that Facebook will be useful for academic purposes. In addition, Gao et al. (2012) believes that a full adoption of Facebook as a learning environment will have obstacles including but not limited to unfamiliarity with the tools, information overload, distraction, cultural issues and other lurking behaviours.

Westerman et al. (2016) examined likely influences of student's attitudes towards social media and face-to-face (FtF) communication. Of the 545 college students that were surveyed online, mass media, instructors and family were the primary sources of the negative attitudes of social media. Yet none of these influences were cited as a source of positive influence concerning social media. This is particularly interesting because environmental factors can affect external influences that students might not be consciously aware of at the time. This finding suggests that the perceptions of technology can bias one's attitude and can potentially hinder any attempt to use social media in the classroom, no matter how well designed the

implementation might be. The study also found that students had several positives of FtF communication with no outside negative aspects.

Madge et al. (2009) attribute the resistance to social media to the “creepy treehouse” phenomenon, which is when social institutions invade spaces like Facebook or when an authority tries to invade a young person’s social space. There are also studies that point to the negative effects of social networks on the academic performance of young people due to excessive dependence that occurs. Truzoli et al. (2019) found that excessive use of the internet among students can adversely affect academic performance, as it reduces their ability to concentrate on scientific research works, given the tendency to spend more time on things that entertain them and which are easier and faster to remember. Another study conducted by Abusbiha and Mustaffa (2014) revealed that students who use Facebook every day have significantly lower grades than those who do not use it. The findings of this study reflect users’ complaints about the amount of time they spend on the social media site, also known commonly as a time sink.

Lim and Richardson (2016) examined the social networking experience of online learners and the potential impact of students’ social presence in online courses and their perceptions of using SNSs for educational purposes. By using a quantitative method, the main findings from this study show that students use SNSs frequently for various reasons and have positive thoughts about using SNSs for educational purposes. In addition, the study showed that the intensity of using social networking experience does not have significant correlation to students perceived social presence but does have positive influence on students’ perceptions of using SNSs for educational purposes. The limitations of this study were the fact that only online graduate students from one program were included and not students from various programs and levels. In

addition, the students that participated were already very familiar with online courses as 85% of them indicated they had taken 5 or more classes previously. This research would have been more substantial with novice and advanced online learners as it would have given more data on inexperienced users.

Resistance from Non-traditional Students

Another issue is that different ages have varying uses for social media. Historically, the term digital divide has referenced discrepancies in access to technology between nations and socio-economic groups. However, Prensky (2001) started using the term to describe the differences in age-related skills and use; creating a digital divide between the generations. The younger generation has grown up with computers and the internet and are referred to as “digital natives.” They are said to have a natural ability with technology and are able to adopt new technologies. The older generation, also known as “digital immigrants,” are thought to be more challenged by technology, showing less technological ability and literacy. This is also causing a huge divide between students and instructors, a gap which Prensky (2001) described as the “biggest single problem facing education today” (p. 2). The chart below defines the generations referred to in this research. Currently, there are five generations using social media:

Table 2:

Generations on Social Media

<i>Generation Name</i>	<i>Birth</i>	<i>Birth End</i>	<i>Youngest</i>	<i>Oldest Age</i>
Baby Boomer Generation	1946	1964	58	76
Generation X	1965	1979	43	57
Xennials	1975	1985	37	47
Millennials – Generation Y - Gen Next	1980	1994	28	42
iGen/Gen Z	1995	2012	10	27

note that there is generational overlap between Generation X and Xennials

A major focus of adults is connecting and staying in touch with their friends and family. The Pew Research Center (2013) reports that older adults in the United States think that being able to communicate is extremely important (49%) or very important (44%) to their quality of life. Research completed by Yuan et al. (2016) looked at the communication frequency and preferred methods of communication as well as the level of satisfaction with existing communication methods. The results indicated that older adults prefer to communicate in-person rather than mediated communication. After face-to-face communication, there was no clear second on the list as all older adults' preferred different methods of communication. In terms of social media, the way older adults use Facebook is very different than other generations. Most older adults use Facebook not to post but to keep informed on what their family and friends are doing by reading posts or lurking. A lurker refers to a member of an online community or online social network who observes, but does not actively participate (Dennen, 2008). This behavior can also be attributed to the fact that a lot of older adults distrust the internet and have privacy concerns.

For individuals within particular age groups, education levels, or geographic locations, social media use may be less normative than for the resisters discussed (Portwood-Stacer, 2013). A study by Vosner et al. (2014) looked at the frequency of computer usage by gender, education, and living environment. The study found that there is a connection between how often the participants use the computer and their level of education. Participants with higher levels of education are more likely to use a computer more than those who have lower education levels. The researchers also found that male participants use computers more frequently than females but both participants use the internet for the purpose of lifelong learning and education (46%).

Participants also noted that using the internet helps them stay in touch with their families and feel more connected and less lonely.

Social media can teach us a lot by utilizing their search engines or using video information sites like YouTube or even online libraries that give access to scholarly journals. For example, when an individual uses YouTube for self-learning, they have the ability to adapt learning from specific scenarios in the video. Thus, anyone can return to any point in a video and practice a certain part as many times as desired (Hong, 2016). This could be beneficial to an adult learner who could use the video as a point of reference or needs additional information because it has been so long since they have been in school. On the other hand, if they are unfamiliar with the medium, will they really use it to receive all of the benefits?

Faculty Resistance

Teachers and administration are the leading group in the resistance against social media. The teaching profession is described as constantly changing and thus lifelong learning includes not only students but also teachers. Learning seems to become a requirement rather than an opportunity (Pareto & Willermark, 2013). With the constant need for teachers to create lesson plans, adapt to new state and federal requirements and keep the classroom interesting so students to want to learn; being a teacher can be very stressful (p. 13). Kalin (2012) states that professors, even before they realize the benefits of modern technology, need to understand how students use modern technologies, in order to keep abreast of current trends. Faculty also understand the need to be careful when posting content on any social network, as this may cause damage to their personal credibility. Others fear privacy issues may negatively affect or even destroy the traditional roles of the teacher and learner (Sickler, 2007). Allowing a student to see personal aspects of your personal life is not something that most faculty are interested in attempting

because they do not want to blur the professional or personal line. Veletsianos and Kimmons (2013) pointed out that tensions exist between online social networks and faculty identity, as well as between personal connections and professional responsibility.

Research completed by Šliogerienė et al. (2014) discovered that faculty had a fear of “losing control” of the learning environment (p. 697). Time also seems to be an important issue; teachers need time to develop, adapt and integrate technology to their classrooms. Teachers also need time to test and choose various social media resources. In addition, the article by Šliogerienė et al. (2014) revealed that the resources needed for a school to integrate social media are numerous. First and foremost; all students would require a computer or smartphone with a connection to the internet. Also, the support that is needed by faculty, staff and students includes (possibly 24-hour) technical support, training and incentives. Lastly, unequal access to technology means that social media use in education heavily depends on the availability of technological resources.

There have been numerous articles and research written in the support of the integration of social media into higher education. However, experiments in the past have often been managed by researchers or technology adopters. However, for the general uptake of technologies and methods in teaching and learning, the focus needs to look at the mainstream majority of teachers and the support they will require and because of this, we have not seen the social media adoption take place (Pareto et al., 2013). The research that has included the teachers in the classroom have mostly been on a small scale and the true thoughts of social media integration are unknown on a larger scale.

Scott et al. (2016) reported that factors such as gender, age and previous experiences influenced teachers' adoption of e-learning and new technologies like social network sites. Similarly, Moran et al. (2012) found that age plays a significant role in the decision to adopt Social Media for teaching. According to their results, younger faculty use Social Media in their teaching more than older faculty. This makes sense as younger faculty would be very familiar with SNS and would easily find ways to incorporate it into their lesson plans and classwork. Older, less experienced faculty would be more hesitant to incorporate social media as they would not feel comfortable or possibly see the benefits of it.

In 2016, Manca and Ranieri provided investigational evidence of how higher education scholars use social media for personal, teaching and professional purposes. To do this, they sent a survey out to an entire Italian university population with a response rate of 10.5%, which corresponded to 6139 responses. The study looks at socio-demographic variables and the relationship between the different types of uses, frequency of use, and e-learning systems. The results showed that social media use is still limited in higher education, but the variable most associated with use is the discipline of the instructor. The results also revealed that the frequency of personal use, e-learning or blended learning correlates with the frequency of professional use. However, the results leaned more favourably towards personal sharing and connecting with peers instead of integrating it into their teaching practice. Although this was the first extensive study in the field, the research had several limitations including response rate, negative preconceptions of social media and a lack of familiarity in the topic.

An article written by Bryant et al. (2014) looked at the potential reasons for institutional and individual resistance to technology enhanced learning. The article states that the integration of technology enhanced learning can affect the future of higher education in two ways; the end of

the university as we know it or a way for higher education to reinvent itself through social media. Several studies have attempted to identify reasons for this latency and resistance, but they point to organizational culture, structure and institutional acceptance. The University of Greenwich Educational Development Unit advertised a call for projects that utilize technology and sharing through social media and called the experiments the Seed Fund Projects. Within most of the projects, there was a degree of resistance from staff or students with the use of technology. In addition, the type of technology being used had some influence on the degree of resistance. For example, iPads are generally a successful intervention; however, one project found that students preferred to bring their own devices, which is a form of resistance. It was found that less than 5% of permanent academic staff applied for the first round of projects through the Seed Fund. A number of the staff interviewed shared that the idea of integrating technology into a new teaching approach was painfully frightening. It is clear that resistance to social media is a present and complex point of tension. Although it is clear that there is a gap between where the institution was and wanted to be in terms of learning innovation, simply providing the equipment and support was not enough to guarantee a successful integration.

Other concerns have also risen about teachers using SNSs for communication outside of the classroom. The potential for unsanctioned communication could happen because students and faculty are using a site that is not governed by the school. To counter this, administration has adopted guidelines that prohibit K-12 teachers from using social media to communicate with their students for non-educational purposes. In addition, teachers are frequently punished for content they or others post on social media even when their students or the school community were not the intended audience. Current doctrine leaves unclear how much authority schools have to control what teachers post online (Papandrea, 2012).

A study published by Pareto et al. (2013) looked at gaining a better understanding of the challenges associated with achieving ICT (Information and Communication Technology) competence by interviewing 17 teachers to investigate their needs and how they want them to be met. The respondents were clear about what they needed to progress: they need the time to teach, time to reflect on their teaching and a need to collaborate with their peer colleagues. Collaborating with colleagues gives them a chance to gain new ideas and be inspired by what others are doing. However, they did note that if there is no opportunity to deploy the new ideas in practice shortly after, there will be no effect. This is consistent with previous research that shows that single professional development days have a limited effect. It does not allow time for instructors to implement and tweak lesson plans in a collaborative environment but is mostly used for reiterating previous goals.

In Hong's (2016) research, the results verified that interest in learning with social media (ILSM) is positively correlated to learning satisfaction with social media (LSSM). This finding is supported by a study done in 1990, which states that learners are likely to perceive their interest in learning effectiveness when the learning environment could easily transfer effective knowledge acquisition. The satisfaction levels can be measured based upon the degree of control users have over the social media and applicability of the course materials. However, according to Salmon (2015) there is a resistance by higher education to incorporate social media into the classroom setting. The main objection to using social media can be divided into three categories: (1) a belief that social media might be a waste of time; (2) the perception of social media platforms as confusing or intimidating; and (3) concerns about blurring social and professional identities.

Length to Unplug

Of the articles found that studied unplugging, users usually abstained from Facebook or social media for a week. A large study by Tromholt (2016) had 1,095 SNS users at a local university abstain from Facebook for a week. Those who unplugged found improved overall wellbeing and an increased focus on other meaningful activities. The study also found that SNS users experience larger improvements over a one-week abstinence period. Another study by Turel et al. (2018) hypothesized that a short period of SNS abstinence would induce a reduction in perceived stress, especially in excessive users. The results revealed that both typical and excessive SNS users experienced reduction in perceived stress following SNS abstinence of several days. The researchers did not want to go shorter than a week because it could cause stress increases and they did not want to go past a week because they thought the participants might enjoy abstaining from the site more than they should. Brown & Kuss (2020) also completed research requesting that participants abstain from social media for seven days. In this research, they aimed to compare psychosocial factors of fear of missing out (FoMO), mental wellbeing (MWB), and social connectedness (SC) before and after the seven days of social media abstinence. The results revealed that participants experienced a significant increase in MWB and SC and a decrease in smartphone use and FoMO following the unplugging from social media while participants had mixed reviews about perceived connectivity in the absence of social media use.

However, a study by Baumer et al. (2015) looked at the reversion of users who planned to unplug and then later planned to return to the site. The authors coined the project “99 Days of Freedom.” In the research, users volunteered to unplug for 99 days, although some users returned

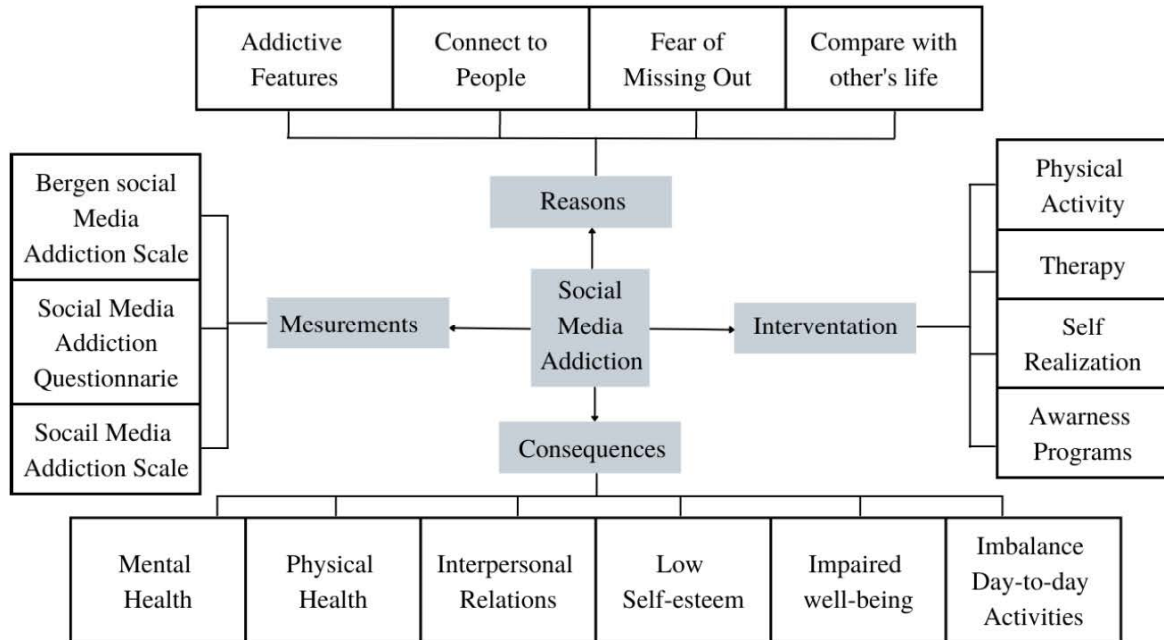
to the site before the end of the study. “Significant factors predicting either increased or decreased likelihood of reversion include, among others, prior use of Facebook, experiences associated with perceived addiction, issues of social boundary negotiation such as privacy and surveillance, use of other social media, and friends’ reactions to non-use” (p. 1). Most participants talked about the fear of missing out (FOMO) on announcements, events, photos and posts; and those participants were more likely to return to Facebook after the study. The results show that the longer the period of disconnectedness, the less anxious users become and FOMO is reduced. The fear of missing out and self-regulation are two of the key components in unplugging.

Ramani and Diwanji (2022) created a diagram illustrating the reasons behind social media addiction, a measuring scale for addiction, consequences of addiction and interventions that can be used to prevent addiction. Reasons for the addiction can be lack of friends, lack of socialization, and monotony of life, as it continues, individuals continue to use it for keeping up with the events, feeling of fulfillment of duty, and protection of social relationships, etc. (p. 36). The researchers had 510 participants complete two addiction scales and a questionnaire to screen for addiction. The research concluded that the addiction of social media had an indirect affect on academic performance and a direct effect on stress and anxiety levels for students. The report goes on to state,

Considering the impact of social media addiction, an important step is to make people realize their social media usage and the result of that. Controlling the craving for the usage of social media may not reduce the addiction and its outcome but being conscious about it can surely help to improve mental and physical health (p. 41).

Figure 2:

Social Media Addiction Reasons, Measuring Scales, Consequences, and Interventions



Note. From “A Review on Impact of Social Media Addiction” by Z. Ramani and H. Diwanji, 2022

(<https://researchjournal.gtu.ac.in/News/3.%20ENG2022205.pdf>). Copyright 2022 by Multidisciplinary International Research Journal of Gujarat Technological University.

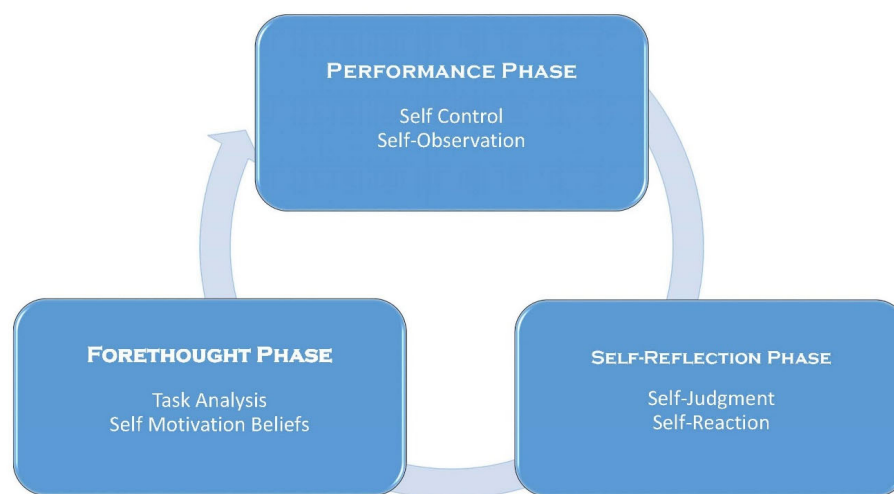
Conceptual Framework

“Self-regulated learning (SRL) is a core conceptual framework to understand the cognitive, motivational, and emotional aspects of learning” (Panadero, 2017). SRL refers to an independent and self-motivated process of acquiring knowledge and skills and includes self-control and self-management. By applying self-regulated learning to variables that impact learning, it can be studied with a comprehensive and holistic approach. Zimmerman (1986) was one of the first SRL authors. The Triadic Analysis model of SRL, represents the interactions of three forms of SRL: environment, behavior and personal level, which was the first attempt to

explain the interactions that influence SRL. In 2013, Zimmerman did a review of his previous work and framed it into the social-cognitive theory (i.e. people acquire knowledge through social interaction and observing others (Panadero, 2017, p. 2).

The self-regulation process can be thought of in three cyclical phases: forethought, performance or volitional control, and the self-reflection phase (see Figure 2). Forethought refers to influential processes that precede efforts to act and set the stage for it. The forethought phase involves the self-regulatory process that happens before a person acts. It involves things like analyzing the task, setting goals and planning strategically. The performance phase includes a self-regulatory process that occurs during the behavior. It involves self-control and affects the attention and actions. The self-reflection phase involves a self-regulatory process that occurs

Figure 3:
Cyclical Phases of Self-Regulation



after the behavior and influences a person's response to the experiences including self-judgements and adaptive self-reactions. The self-reflection affects the forethought process and beliefs about future efforts to learn. Self-regulation is a cycle that involves taking in feedback and adapting.

Overall, self-regulation refers to self-generated thoughts, feelings, and actions that are planned and cyclically adapted to the attainment of personal goals (Boekaerts et al., 2005). For example, when you have the thought to go on social media, you are usually going on for a reason whether it is to post something, receive an update or check notifications. Self-regulation is an essential skill necessary to manage the use of social media when planning or performing learning activities (Chokalingam, et al., 2018). The multiple distractions on social media can easily take your focus away from the task at hand so self-regulation is needed when online.

The research completed by Hill et al. (2009) investigated adult learners' self-regulated learning (SRL) experience in a graduate online course. Specifically, a qualitative research design was adopted to observe learners' resource use and learners' motivation to learn in an online course. The resources used by the participants were classified into two categories: information resources and human resources. Information resources included the course website, discussion boards and chat feature. All participants used the information resources to monitor learning progress, seek answers to questions and interact with each other. Human resources that were identified were the instructor, peers in class and personal connections. Each participant indicated that they would go to the instructor for help with assignments but would look to other students in class for learning support. The motivation to learn was also identified in the article and included seeking course related information, the desire for knowledge, monitoring learning progress, course requirements and social interactions. Motivation can come in varying forms. The authors indicated that some of the motivation factors are common in several types of learning contexts while others are specific to online learning. For example, seeking course related information or social interactions are especially important in an online learning environment. The benefits of this research are that it gives readers a look at how students use SRL to excel in an online class

which is important since there is limited synchronous interaction. The disadvantages of this research are that all six participants were white females around the same age which does not give a varying opinion about SRL.

Matzat & Vrieling (2015) examined 459 survey responses of secondary education teachers to see if self-regulated learning “naturally aligns” with social media. Specifically, the researchers wanted to know if teachers who practice SLR in the classroom are more likely to experiment with social media use in the classroom and if they experience beneficial outcomes in their class. The teachers surveyed taught courses in natural sciences, social sciences and humanities and the data used was collected from July to October in six prominent online communities for teachers in these disciplines. Results indicated that the use of SRL in face-to-face teaching is a relevant factor. The findings provided evidence that there is a “natural alliance” between SRL practices and social media use in the classroom. Large groups of teachers rely on YouTube for classroom content. In addition, more than a third of the teachers used social media for communication outside of the classroom with students. Another finding of the research is that although many teachers use social media, only few instructors use it for the facilitation of SRL.

Chapter Summary

The literature shows that media resistance is a growing phenomenon among various technology users who are looking for ways to push back and manage or reduce their dependence on technology. Another important element to consider is the way different age groups use social media and the internet causing a digital divide between generations. In addition, although Facebook dominated the research around resistance, the pushback is on all social media

platforms and is not limited only to Facebook. The research plans to explore resistance in other mediums such as Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube.

Adult learners who are already using social media will embrace the use of it in the classroom. However, if the correct trainings are not offered – just as they are for first time users in an online environment – there will continue to be a resistance against the implementation of social media in higher education. The findings from the study completed by Manca & Ramirez (2016) show that faculty are more inclined to adapt social media for personal and professional uses verses implementing it into teaching practices. Those open to it are using social media to make new connections with peers, for collaboration and even research dissemination. The attitudes of faculty against social media must be changed by allowing time for planning and execution. It will also help if administration provided support and training. However, because the implementation of social media with online education is so new, there needs to be more research done to look at ways to overcome the reluctance of social media usage and the need to unplug.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore how four adults experience the act of “push back” through the process of unplugging from social media as it relates to the three phases of self-regulated learning: Forethought, performance and self-reflection. With the influx of research, newspaper and magazine articles, documentaries and even technology that helps you unplug, this is a significant and timely issue to consider. This chapter addresses the rationale for research and my approach, describes the research setting and context, discusses data collection, data analysis, and limitations of the research.

Patton (2002) believes that qualitative studies are the best approach to an in-depth investigation. A qualitative approach allows the participants to communicate the experiences that led them to their current and past feelings about social media and their experiences while being unplugged. Corbin and Strauss (2012) confirm, “Qualitative research allows researchers to get at the inner experience of participants, to determine how meanings are formed through and in culture, and to discover rather than test variables (p. 11). Bhattacharya (2017) concludes, “If a qualitative researcher is trying to understand someone’s experiences then s/he conducts a study where s/he collects all relevant information surrounding the experience and reports them” (p. 19). Bhattacharya (2017) goes on to explain the researcher should not generalize but provide an in depth look at the participant and the data. This research works to better “understand” the act of “push back” through the process of unplugging from social media as it relates to the three phases of self-regulated learning: forethought, performance and self-reflection.

In 2010, Tracy developed eight universal marks for high quality in quantitative research to ensure it is valid, reliable and subjective. Following the eight markers of quality are (1) worthy

topic, (2) rich rigor, (3) sincerity, (4) credibility, (5) resonance, (6) significant contribution, (7) ethics, and (8) meaningful coherence. The criteria outlined in the article by Tracy (2010) allowed me to produce a rigorous, well-executed study.

The first marker, worthy topic, speaks to the interest in the topic by the mass public. My topic of unplugging from social media is relevant, timely, significant and interesting. Social media is a phenomenon within itself that few truly understand – algorithms designed to keep you engaged, amount of use/addiction and eventually the need to pull back or unplug at times. The more research done on the topic, the more understanding and knowledge that can be applied. Tracy believes, “worthy topics just as easily grow from timely societal or personal events” (Tracy, 2010, p. 840). As I stated in Chapter One, there were several personal events and prompts that led me to this topic.

The next standard for quality is rich rigor. As the researcher, I tried to incorporate descriptions and explanations of the data that are rich. According to Tracy (2010), richness is generated through theoretical constructs, data sources, contexts and samples. In connection, “rigor also provides face validity – which is concerned with whether a study appears to be reasonable and appropriate” (p. 841). Tracy goes on to say that researchers should show evidence of the time and effort put into the research along with the care and practice of analyzing. The data collection for this study spanned over two months and even longer to transcribe, fact check and decipher its findings.

The third factor in high quality quantitative research is sincerity. Sincerity relates to genuineness and authenticity. “Sincerity means that the research is marked by honesty and transparency about the researcher’s biases, goals and foibles as well as how these played a role in

the methods, joys and mistakes of the research” (Tracy, 2010, p. 841). The self-reflexivity I wrote about in Chapter One talks about the strength of my social media knowledge but also it is a shortcoming because I have yet to have a negative experience with it. Due to this, I have not found a need to formally unplug, but as the researcher continued to discover the negative effects of social media, I journaled about also pulling back and not spending as much time online.

The fourth ground rule is credibility. Credibility speaks to the trustworthiness and believability of my research findings. If your research is credible, “readers feel trustworthy enough to act on and make decisions in line with” (Tracy, 2010, p. 843). I showed credibility within the research by offering “thick description” throughout the research by showing instead of telling the reader what they should think or react to the information provided. Another element present in the research is multivocality, which includes multiple and varied voices in the report and analysis. It was important to that the experience of unplugging was told through the subjects’ words and to not misinterpret any of the results with my words.

Next on the list is resonance which can “be achieved through aesthetic merit, evocative writing, and formal generalizations as well as transferability” (Tracy, 2010, p. 844). The main point of resonance is that you want to affect the audience in some way. Tracy (2010) goes on to say, “Not every qualitative study must achieve resonance in the same way, but all high-quality qualitative reports must have impact” (pp. 844-845). Resonance is achieved within this study because this research has transferability as well as will affect people and make them think about the way they use, interact and/or abuse social media.

The sixth component to follow is ensuring that the research makes a significant contribution to the field. Tracy (2010) also suggests gauging the current climate of knowledge,

practice, and politics and asking questions such as, “Does the study extend knowledge, improve practice or generate ongoing research?” The topic of unplugging from social media is worthy of research, relevant and timely. According to Tracy (2010), significant research can be categorized in four ways – theoretically significant, Heuristic significance, practically significant research and methodological significance. This study fits into this category because it asked, “Does it help to shed light on or helpfully frame a contemporary problem? Does it help to empower participants to see the world another way?” (Tracy, 2010, p. 846). This study would definitely extend knowledge and contribute to our understanding of the impact of social media on adults’ social life.

Next on the list of instruction towards high quality quantitative research is ethics. In this instance, ethics refers to the actions of the researcher being right or wrong. Tracy states “Ethics are not just a means, but rather constitute a universal end goal of qualitative quality itself, despite paradigm” (p. 846). In this research, I was sincere and transparent about the methods and challenges of the research.

The final component of qualitative quality is meaningful coherence. According to Tracy (2010), meaningful coherent studies “achieve the stated purpose, accomplish what they espouse to be about, use methods and practices that partner well and attentively interconnect literature with research methods and findings” (p. 848). I accomplished meaningful coherence by stating the purpose of the study and by connecting my research purpose to the literature, methods and findings.

Hermeneutic Phenomenology

The methodological approach that informed this social media research is hermeneutic phenomenology. Edmund Husserl is credited as the father of phenomenology. Husserl believed that “natural sciences has become detached from the fabric and reality of human experience” (Crotty, 1996, p. 28). According to his view, scientific knowledge would start with describing the objects of study to phenomena to consciousness (Suddick et al., 2020). Phenomenology concentrates on the experience of the participant. Bhattacharya (2017) confirms by saying,

One of the key originating ideas of phenomenology is that if we had experienced a phenomenon in our past, as we recall our experiences, then perhaps we can find possibilities for new ways of understanding those experiences through making new meanings and gaining new insights (p. 64).

Phenomenology allows researchers to explore everyday experiences in detail and attempts to discover the meaning that people put on their lived experiences.

Heidegger rejects the notion that humans must suspend previous understanding, indicating, rather, that is through our prior understanding and reflections that we can ask further questions and better understand experience. This interconnectedness of ‘all that is’ distinguishes Heidegger’s thought from that of others (Dibley et al., 2020, p. 17)

Hermeneutic phenomenology was conceptualized when Martin Heidegger started to reject Husserl’s being *of* the world; he thought it was more important to be *in* the world. Dibley et al. (2020) believe that “human beings don’t encounter things in the world, but there is a connection between the human and the world and the decisions they make are due to their lived experiences” (p. 17). Though the years, several types of phenomenological inquiry have emerged and share a common interest in understanding the nature of the human experience (Suddick et al., 2020).

Looking at the whole of a person (background, experiences, gestures and inflections in your voice) is important when applying phenomenology to research. The best way to gain information for this study was from interviewing people who had agreed to unplug and learn from their experiences. Gadamer (2008) believes, “Nothing that is said has its truth simply in itself, but refers instead backward and forward to what is unsaid” (p. 67). Knowing this, during the interview process I asked follow-up questions according to what the participant said or how they responded and looked for a deeper meaning in their experience.

I chose hermeneutic phenomenology as the approach because it is believed that a participant’s lived experiences with social media affect the way they unplug as well as their experience while being unplugged. “In other words, to interpret something, we have to understand it first, and it is this understanding that we take into our future experience(s)” (Dibley et al., 2020, p. 20). At its inception, hermeneutic phenomenology was used in the interpretation of texts focusing on language and communication. Most recently, it has expanded to look at multimedia data, which will benefit this study since it will focus on information from surveys, interviews and journaling.

One of the ways to ensure rigor in a phenomenological approach is bracketing. According to Klein and Westcott (1994), phenomenological bracketing means that an individual selects a phenomenon, isolates the phenomenon for inspection, uses their imagination to conceive of variances, and merges these variances to arrive at the essence of a phenomenon. The theoretical perspective is aligned with the research purpose, as social media usage with adults is the phenomenon being inspected. However, with 79% of adults using social media (Ortiz-Ospina, 2019) is it possible for adults to have no prior opinion of social media?

“The criticism for bracketing has been that it might never really be possible for one to really claim a pure compartmentalization of one’s prior knowledge and subjectivities to such an extent that there can be no influence on the meaning-making processes during inquiry.” (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 64)

The prior and lived experiences of the adult learners will affect their opinion about social media as a whole.

Edwards and Titchen (2003) argue that bracketing is a two-step process; that of the participant and that of the researcher. The researchers go on to mention that full bracketing of participants’ experiences cannot be totally possible. Along with the participants’ interpretations, the researcher will have their own. As a researcher, if I have a negative or a positive opinion of social media, it could be reflected in the themes and codes of the interview. Alternatively, Dibley et al. (2020) suggest,

“Instead of ‘bracketing out’ our pre-existing knowledge gleaned from experience and literature, hermeneutic phenomenologists recognize and call forth the assumption and pre-understandings they bring to the work, continually checking their interpretations against the text and among the team. By engaging in the literature in an open, reflexive manner, we bring to the fore our own suppositions, opinions and biases, and adopt an open, accepting attitude toward the possibilities of experience we seek to explore” (p. 42).

Pre-existing knowledge is hard thing to recognize, however, using this process helped alleviate previous bias and opinion from my research.

With hermeneutical phenomenology as the larger overarching framework, this study used Zimmerman's (2009) framework for self-regulated learning as a content level framework guiding data collection and analysis. Zimmerman's (2009) framework consists of the three phases of self-regulated learning; forethought, performance and self-reflection.

Self-regulated learning is a cyclical process, whereby the participant plans for a task, monitors their performance, and reflects on the outcome (Zimmerman, 2002). Self-regulation is described as cyclical because the feedback from a previous task is used to make adjustments during the next (see Figure 2). According to Boekaerts, et al. (2005), "such adjustments are necessary because personal, behavioral, and environmental factors are constantly changing during the course of learning and performance, and must be observed or monitored using three self-oriented feedback loops" (p. 14). Self-regulated learning was applied in the research as a content level theory. Phenomenology, hermeneutic phenomenology, and self-regulated learning guided my methodologies from data collection to analysis to representation of the data.

Data Collection

deMarrais (2003) defines an interview as "a process in which a researcher and participant engage in a conversation focused on questions related to a research study" (p. 54). The questions in an interview are designed to ask participants their thoughts, opinions, perspectives or descriptions of specific experiences. A qualitative interview is a critical element in a phenomenological study. "Qualitative interviews are used when researchers want to gain in-depth knowledge from participants about particular phenomena, experiences, or sets of experiences" (deMarrais, 2003, p. 52). The phenomena that the researcher plans to explore is social media, with the experience being deciding to unplug for two weeks. Bhattacharya (2017) defines it by saying "Qualitative interviews are intentional, with specific ways of inquiring" (p.

126). She goes on to give examples of questions that can be used in qualitative interviews. These questions were adapted from Spradley's (1979) approach to interview questions for beginners. These standards were utilized to create the interview questions for this research (see Appendix D).

Furthermore, asking open-ended questions gives the participant an opportunity to provide their perspective on the research topic. deMarrais (2003) goes on to clarify

The interview then becomes a unique form of discourse between two people where one is an informed learner who is there to learn about another's experiences or series of experiences, view, perspectives or reactions to a particular phenomenon or event.

Researchers and participants tend to filter each interview experience through unique sets of experiences, beliefs and assumptions about the topic of the research (p. 55)

Through the methods of phenomenological inquiry, the study examined the experience of adults who unplug from social media.

In addition to the open-ended interviews, the data collection methods used were participant transcripts and journaling by both the participants and the researcher. Journaling can include pen and paper, Word document(s), recording themselves (i.e. video diary) and voice recording. Furthermore, keeping a researcher journal added transparency as a researcher. A journal can be used to document thoughts, patterns, follow-up questions and explore additional subjects. Trustworthiness in qualitative research was outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1994) and includes credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability and authenticity. This falls in line with the eight-point conceptualization provided by Tracy (2010). It is important to note that

these eight markers can be applied to a variety of fields and crafts.

Participants and Participant Selection

The first rule of participant selection was that the participant had experienced the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The criteria for member selection in this study were as follows:

1. The participant must have at least a Facebook and a LinkedIn account that they are willing to unplug from for a total of two weeks. The Facebook and LinkedIn account will represent a personal and professional outlet.
2. To ensure that there is enough experience on which to reflect in the interview, the participant must have had their social media profiles for at least a year.
3. While having the profiles for a year, the participant must have used the site actively (i.e., posted photos, updates, created groups or events)
4. The participant must be able to verbally detail their experiences with this phenomenon

According to Patton (2002), qualitative sampling is based on purposive selection, the sample size is flexible and not predetermined, and the goal is not to make generalizable claims but develop in-depth understandings with the richest evidence possible (p. 273). Creswell (2007) deems that the sample size for a phenomenological study is generally between one and ten participants.

Since it is a common trend for people to announce their exit on social media and that they will be unplugging or taking a break, I was able to keep a list for at least a year prior to the study to identify social media participants who were willing to unplug. I believed the fact that they unplugged in that past would provide a willingness to remove oneself from social media again, which was important for participation in the project. Once recruitment began for the research, I

asked participants via social media, through email and posts within social groups. Luckily, I do not personally know everyone that followed me on social media so during the research, I could focus on being a researcher instead of a friend. Due to the interest from my social media posts, I did not have to contact the list of people who had previously unplugged to see if anyone was interested in participating in the study.

To collect the profiles of multiple participants, I sent the initial screening questions (see Appendix C) to each person that was interested. The screening questions consisted of multiple choice and fill in the blank answers. I contacted those interested to discuss participation at a face-to-face or Zoom meeting. It was at that time that I met the participant and had an informal chat about the research, answered any questions they might have and invited them to participate. By incorporating these three tactics, I recruited six participants to engage in unplugging for two weeks but ended up only interviewing five total for the initial interview. The fifth participant had to be dropped from the research due to lack of response. Participants were between the ages of 25 and 55 years old and lived in the Midwest because of convenience sampling. Dibley et al. (2020) wrote about sampling and how introducing multiple variables would confuse the results and create a low chance of people experiencing the same thing.

In the case of hermeneutic phenomenological research, purposive sampling is the method of choice precisely because it selects people who have had the experience of interest, those who are most able to provide insights into the particular phenomenon and therefore most likely to provide data which addresses the research question (p. 54).

The participants all had at least one Facebook account and one LinkedIn account. Three rounds of one-on-one interviews were conducted: (1) prior to the study; (2) after two weeks of

unplugging; and (3) two weeks after unplugging and returning to social media accounts.

Normally, these interviews would be conducted in person, but due to COVID-19, the researcher let the participants decide if they wanted to do their interviews in person or through Zoom. The three stages of questioning are meant to look at the participant's attitudes towards unplugging before, immediately after unplugging and a month later. In addition, the participants were asked to journal their feelings and observations while using social media, during the hiatus and after returning. Each participant was also asked to journal their unplugging experience by writing at least two paragraphs with each journal entry. The purpose of this research was to interview adult learners who unplug from social media and look at the positive benefits and negative effects it has on their lives.

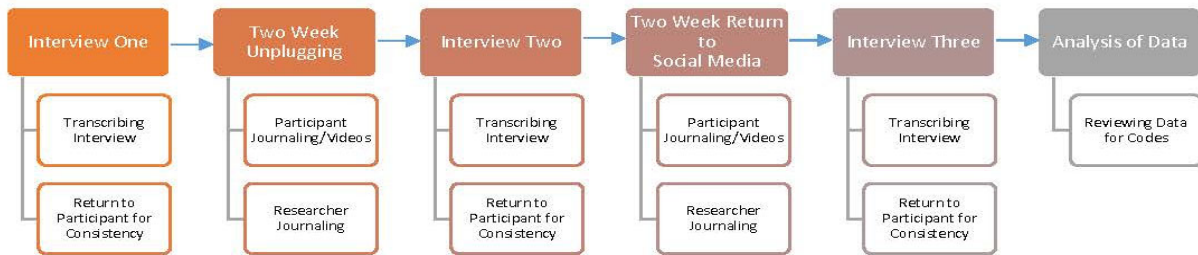
The anonymity of the participants was protected by referring to them as Participants 1-6 with a password protected legend within the researcher's files. Once the unplugging was over, I allowed the participants to supply me with a pseudonym for research purposes. Data was collected by personal interviews and participant journals. The participants received their three journals at the initial meeting and the project guidelines were discussed in detail. I designed a set of screening questions to guide the interview and participant selection to ensure each participant fit the required criteria. At this time, I reviewed the consent form and got it signed. The participants in the study were allowed to decide at any time to stop participating in the study with no repercussions or actions taken against them. However, I requested an exit interview to establish the reasons behind stopping their participation.

Data Collection & Data Keeping

I used participant assignments, open journaling and interviews, as points of data collection because collecting more than one type of data would help add validity to my findings. In Figure 4, the first line shows the ongoing data collection while the subsequent lines show additional data that is being collected at the same time.

Figure 4:

Timeline of the Data Flow in Research



Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and sent to the participants for review. This process was completed each time, prior to the following interview. There was a total of three transcribed interviews to assess the views of each participant while in the forethought, performance and self-reflection phase of SRL. A popular technique that qualitative researchers use to verify the accuracy of the transcripts and ensure trustworthiness is to send the written transcripts back to the participants to ensure the researcher captured the true representation of the experience. This is called member checking (Dibley et al., 2020). The authors go on to explain that member checking “confirms validity, particularly to overcome the bias inherent when the data collector is also the data analyst” (p. 146).

I used the in-depth open interview. There are several different ways that interviews can help the researcher to understand experiences. Bhattacharya (2017) explains in depth interviews “usually focus on digging deep into one’s experiences with a few key questions prepared in advance” (p. 127). I developed key questions and additional probing questions to get to a deeper understanding of the participants’ unplugging experience. Spradley (1979) also writes about a semi structured interview where you use grand tour questions that ask respondents to give a verbal tour of something they know well (pp. 86-88). Grand tour questions get respondents talking in a fairly focused way. The interviewer is also responsible for providing a comfortable environment for the participant (Moustakas, 1994). To guarantee the participant was comfortable, all the interviews were held at a location of the participant’s choice and at their convenience in this research.

Once the participants received their journals at the initial meeting, they also received daily assignments and the due dates of the journals. Immediately after the meeting, the participants would start journaling. The journal provided perceptions of social media prior to unplugging. The first journal captured the thoughts and feelings of participants during their two-week unplugging. The second journal was collected the following month as participants were asked to document the experience of rejoining social media and how their perceptions of it were different after unplugging. The journals were mailed in postage paid envelopes or scanned in and emailed directly to me through email.

Furthermore, keeping a researcher journal would add to my transparency as a qualitative researcher as well. The researcher journal was used to document ideas, thoughts, hunches, follow-up questions and explore additional subjects.

Data Analysis

The process for collecting and analyzing data should be kept separate. Seidman (2013) suggests keeping them separate as not to anticipate responses. The interviewer should do an in-depth analysis of the interviews after they have all been completed to avoid imposing meaning from one participant's interview to the next. In my study, each interview was recorded, which provided original data and accountability. "The assurance that there is a record of what they have said to which they have access can give them more confidence that their words will be treated responsibly" (Seidman, 2013, p. 117). I used YouTube as my transcription service since the site provided the feature of automatically transcribing audio files. To ensure data security, I saved the videos as private and removed the videos after generating transcripts so no one had access to the interviews. I went back, proofread, and corrected the transcripts before sending them back to the participants for review and approval.

Coding is the activity of labeling and organizing your data to identify theme and find the relationship between them. My strategy for coding the interviews was to focus on how participants experienced the phases of forethought, performance and self-reflection. During this data analysis, the SRL lens guided the coding of the data. The specific coding approach applied the self-regulated learning framework through the headings (see Figure 2). The first cycle of coding explored stories and themes that applied task analysis and self-motivation beliefs. The second cycle of coding analyzed the performance phase by looking at self-control and self-observation. Finally, the third cycle of coding focused on patterns of self-judgment and self-reaction. The codes were generated by me. I combined all three of the interviews of each participant into short chapters and read them several times. While doing this, I highlighted quotes I found interesting and labeled entries with keywords. After reading carefully through the data by

participant, I combined the interviews by phases to find commonalities between the participants. Siedman (2013) suggests marking passages of interest and labeling those passages as if you were writing a research paper. I also combined journal entries onto one page under each of the 28 writing prompts to make it easier to identify commonalities between the participant's experiences. Once again, I highlighted quotes I found interesting and labeled entries with keywords. By highlighting and labeling quotes with descriptive words during both processes, I was able to identify 32 keywords. By listing the words on one page, I was able to group common words into clusters and condense journal entries and interviews into six overarching themes.

When interpreting and reducing the text, I looked for common themes throughout the transcripts. "It is important that researchers acknowledge in this stage of the process that they are exercising judgement about what is significant in the transcript" (Siedman, 2013, p. 120). The judgement used was determined by my experiences as a qualitative researcher. To ensure that there was clarity in the themes, I checked with the participants to distinguish areas of interest in the transcription. "The researcher then searches for connecting threads and patterns among the excerpts within those categories and for connections between the various categories that might be called themes" (Siedman, 2013, p. 127). The process of noting categories and labeling them is called thematic analysis. After finding several themes and codes, I made meaning of those codes using the analysis process.

Croft (2022) believes, "Every analysis or evaluation of real experience starts with some affective premises which may be seen as personal biases or hidden assumptions" (p. 132). As the researcher, I wanted to assure that those thought processes, ideas, and biases were addressed. Using a phenomenological approach not only let me go beyond what happened and what was said, but also allow me to share what I felt about it. Besides reporting the findings from the

research, therefore, I also provided personal reflections that, hopefully, would help the reader understand my thought process while conducting this research.

Ethics

According to Afrin (2018), there are several things to ethically consider when doing qualitative research: informed consent and voluntary participation, anonymity and confidentiality, and data analysis and dissemination of the findings. All participants recruited for this study was asked to fill out and sign an informed consent form and they did so of their own free will (see Appendix C). In addition, I explained that participants also had a right to withdraw from the study at any time even after the informed consent had been signed. The proper paperwork was submitted through Kansas State University Institutional Review Board and was approved.

Affrin (2018) also recommends that, “the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants was preserved by not revealing their names and identity in the data collection, analysis and reporting of the study findings” (p. 30). Pseudonyms were created to protect confidentiality in this research and I followed the necessary protocols closely to maintain confidentiality when collecting, storing, and analyzing research data. When interviewing, for example, I did so in private. If there was not an opportunity to do a one-on-one interview, I used earphones to keep the information private. I was the only one who could identify the participants through voice recordings. In addition, I kept all the transcribed interviews and journals using password protective storage.

In regard to data analysis and dissemination of the findings, I removed the participants’ identities during data transcription process and participants were simply referred to as P

(participant) 1, 2, 3 or 4. Once I started writing and presenting the findings, the participants were always referred to by their pseudonyms in order to protect their identity.

Limits and Possibilities of the Study

One limitation of this study was that the participants recruited were of similar demographic makeup so all the interpretive context offered in this study was coming through the lens of four African American women. I did not go out intending to do this but that is the limitation of this study. Due to the convenience sample, the results of this study should not be generally applied to a larger population without caution.

However, by having a homogeneous sample in this study, I was able to get a deeper understanding of four African-American women's experiences of unplugging from social media. This study is a great gateway for more research in this area. The age group of the participants in this study is important as the participants represents the largest age group in 7 out of 12 of the most popular social media apps. In addition, the educational level of these women provides the highest usage on 10 of the 12 most popular social media apps (see Table 1).

Knowing that very little research has been done to look at the resistance to social media and how it affects adults personally and professionally, I would say this study did contribute to our understanding of the social media unplug phenomenon by sharing the unplugging experiences of the four African-American women participants as well as my personal reflections on their experiences. Due to the fact that very little research has been done in the area of unplugging and resistance, it is safe to assume that little to none of the available research looked at the African-American unplugging experience. This research provided understanding into an area that has not been studied very much. Furthermore, there is literature that has connected SRL

to social media in general but there has not been a connection between SRL and unplugging. Therefore, this study was also to help fill in this gap. More specifically, I shared how the four African-American women experienced social media unplugging – through stories that focused around the SRL framework. By using the SRL framework, this study added to the literature on pushback, unplugging and self-regulated learning.

Chapter Summary

To summarize, a phenomenological approach was used for this study. I recruited a group of adult participants who provided qualitative data by journaling, face-to-face interviews and transcription review. These transcripts were kept in a secure location and will be destroyed after three years. The participants of this study all had been using social media for at least a year and been an active user by posting and interacting within the platform. In this study, they unplugged for two weeks total but were engaged in journaling for a total of four weeks (two weeks during and two weeks after reengaging).

Chapter 4 - Findings

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the results of my research. First, I discuss the participants and their demographic data. Next, by sharing their unplugging experiences as they go through the forethought, performance and self-reflection phases, I answer the research questions through the lens of self-regulated learning.

Participants

Finding participants to unplug from social media proved to be more of a task than originally thought. I researched the best times to post on social media as suggested by Social Media Marketing (2021), as shown in Table 3 below:

Table 3:

The Best Time to Post on Social Media

SM Site	Best Time to Post	Worst Day	First Post	Second Post
Facebook	Tuesday, Wednesday & Friday 9 AM - 1 PM	Sunday	Friday, April 16 10:24 AM	Tuesday, April 27 10:06 AM
Instagram	Monday - Friday 11:00 AM	Sunday	Friday, April 16 11:06 AM	Monday, April 26 10:17 AM
LinkedIn	Tuesday - Thursday 9 AM - 12 PM	Sunday	Tuesday, April 13 11:07 AM	Wednesday, April 28 10:12 AM
Twitter	Tuesday 9 AM - 3 PM Wednesday 9 AM - 11 AM	Saturday	Tuesday, April 13 11:06 AM	Monday, April 26 10:17 AM

Note. The figure was created from information obtained from “Best times to post on social media in 2021 (new data)” by L. Moorehead, 2021 (<https://www.impactplus.com/blog/best-times-to-post-on-social-media-2021-new-data>). Copyright 2022 by IMPACT.

I advertised using several social media sites (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn) over a two-week time frame to extend offers to the 3,483 followers I had on social media. Posting online was the original way I had planned to alert the public of my unplugging project and to

recruit participants. If there was not enough interest, I planned to reach out to social media contacts who had announced a leave from social media within the last two years. However, reaching out to the list was not necessary because there were 12 responses received from the eight posts on social media. There were five direct messages (DM) received on Facebook and another five received on Instagram. Additionally, two people expressed their interest (from seeing the post) verbally. Of the 12 prospective participants, only one was male and the remaining 11 were female. Once they expressed interest, a Survey Monkey link was sent to them to ensure they met the research criteria (see Appendix D). However, not all 12 completed the survey. The survey was completed by six people. Once the responses were submitted, I checked the responses against the participant criteria (see Participants and Participant Selection) and followed up with the prospective participant to set up the initial interview. Of the six that completed the survey, only five responded to set up their initial interview. The unplugging project was initially completed by five volunteer participants. However, due to inconsistencies in attending follow-up interviews, the fifth participant did not complete the second and the third interview and responses collected from this fifth participant were only included in the forethought phase.

All five participants were African American women, between the ages of 36 and 41, working full time, with at least a bachelor's degree. Two of the participants are married or in a long-term relationship and three are single with no children. Due to the convenience sampling of recruiting from social media followers, there was no location requirement for this study. However, all participants lived in the Midwest area (Kansas City, MO; St. Louis, MO, Bloomington, IL, and Dallas, TX). Four of the five participants spent a significant amount of

time online but mostly in a “passive” mode by watching and reading instead of posting. In addition, only three of the four participants had unplugged before for personal reasons.

The participants of this study received, signed and scanned the Consent Email/Letter (see Appendix B) prior to the initial interview. Once the paperwork was in hand and the initial interview was complete, the participants were asked to choose a day to start unplugging and journaling about their experiences for two weeks. The participants responded to 14 journal prompts and wrote about their daily experiences while being unplugged. The second interview was administered directly after the two-week unplugging, followed by 14 more journaling prompts after returning to social media. The final and third interview was conducted a month to a month and a half after returning to social media.

Participant One, Kenya, was a single mother, with two children and a long-term boyfriend who worked as an Insurance Manager. She was a self-proclaimed “lurker” who primarily enjoyed social media for the entertainment it provides.

I don’t really post a lot of stuff. I may share funny videos or social justice videos but I don’t really get on there to talk about what’s going on in my life or even to post pictures and videos of my kids. I just typically have my phone near me all day and if I feel like I need a quick break away from work, I just get on my phone and scroll social media.

She was interested in unplugging because of the amount of time she spent online daily.

Participant Two, Fallon, was a single woman with no children who had just relocated back to her Mid-western hometown from a large metropolitan city while she studied for a professional exam and located a new job. She had previously unplugged on multiple occasions with the longest being a year without social media.

I feel like it's always good to unplug at some point and this is going to be great timing for me to unplug because I am in the process of studying for the CPA exam. I can get sucked in (social media) for extended amounts of time if I don't watch it.

She decided to participate in this study because she wanted to unplug so she could focus more on her exam.

Participant Three, Nikita, was a married woman with two children who was in the middle of a career change and, at the time, was being trained in this new career field. Nikita has a love/hate relationship with social media.

My relationship with social media is toxic and my kids notice. They have told me, 'you're not listening because you're on Facebook' and they're right. I will miss the foolishness that you see every day that makes you laugh, but I'll be grateful I'm not looking at that and I'm not spending my time unfocused because I'm looking for the next crazy thing.

She decided to participate in this study so she could unplug but also focus more on her family, business plan and her new career.

Participant Four, Yvette, was a single woman with no children who moved to the area to attend college, 20 years ago, and never returned back home. She used social media for the laughs and the drama, but it also allowed her to stay in touch with her family, who was physically more than four hours away by car. She admitted that she used social media from the time she awoke until she went to bed; she had referred to herself as a social media junkie. "I planned to unplug last Monday, but I failed miserably. I thought I was mentally prepared to start to unplug, but I woke up that morning and went back to my old habits." She ended up starting to unplug from

social media from the following week with no issues. She previously unplugged for 40 days in the past for lent.

Participant Five, Renee, was a single woman with no children who held an Ph.D in Public Policy. She was a native of St. Louis and had lived there her entire life receiving all of her degrees from local universities. Renee used social media in increments since she had a demanding job that did not allow her to engage with social media more than five to ten minutes at a time during the week. However, she did check it before work to see what had happened overnight. Renee unplugged on a consistent basis for a few weeks to months at a time. Renee primarily used Instagram, GroupMe and LinkedIn and regularly unplugged at around six times a year.

Findings

The six themes produced from the three interviews and the 28 journal entries shared with the researcher are: (1) Habitual Use; (2) Missing Current Events; (3) Going Down the Rabbit Hole; (4) Mixed Feelings; (5) Benefits of Unplugging; and (6) Future Approach. Below, I describe each theme individually as it relates to unplugging by using relevant quotes from the participants.

Habitual Use

Throughout the journal entries, there were several references to being “addicted” to social media as well as social media being a “habit” and participant’s “non-stop use” of social media. Evidence of addiction and habitual use was found throughout all three phases of SRL (see Table 4). All of the participants said that one of the reasons that they unplugged was due to their daily usage and time spent and/or wasted on social media. In addition, all of the participants noted that

social media was the first thing they did when they woke up and the last thing that they did before going to sleep. Social media is something that is engrained in their daily lives. Yvette stated, “I would get side-tracked easily by social media and hop on for – what I would think would be a minute – when in reality, I am on for over an hour.” That is a common tale of social media, going on for one reason in particular and getting distracted by the many things social media offers.

In the first few days of the unplugging, many of the participants wrote or talked about the innate urge to pick up the phone and click on their app of choice. Although they knew they were participating in a study, looking at social media was something they still felt compelled to do. During the performance interview, Kenya reflected by saying,

“I was just going to those sites out of habit. I would literally click the app then I would think, ‘I’m not supposed to be on here’ and I would log out. As soon as I was in, I got back out and that’s how I figured it was just a habit for me. I just do it without even thinking about it.”

There were several instances during the unplugging where participants wrote about scrolling through their phone looking for a social media app only to remember that they were participating in an unplugging project. Kenya confessed, “I realized that I just click on Facebook, Tik-Tok, Instagram and Pinterest icons just out of habit and not because I want to actually get on those sites and posting something or view something.” This is probably true for all participants because they all stated that none of them posts very often on social media.

The temptation of getting on social media was also fueled by family and friends who were not aware of the project. Even with deleting the app, participants wrote about links being sent through text and/or group messages. Participants reported feeling “left out” of the conversation because they were unable to click the link as a part of their commitment to unplugging. Yvette even replied to a text with a simple “LOL” to pacify her cousin who sent the link as not to alienate herself even more. Fallon reflected during her performance interview by saying, “The only issue I had was in my group chats. People would text me or send me things and say look at this post. I would have to write back and tell them I can’t look or see what it is because I’m unplugged.” I wonder if the participants were not participating in the study and just unplugged for personal reasons – if they still would have insisted on not checking the links. In addition, when the unplugging was actually happening, they quickly realized how addicted they were to social media. In the first few days of the unplugging, many of the participants wrote or talked about the innate urge to pick up the phone and click on their app of choice. Although they knew they were participating in a study, looking at social media was something they still felt compelled to do.

Table 4:

Quotes Regarding Habitual Use During the Phases of SRL

	Kenya	Fallon	Nikita	Yvette
Forethought	I just typically have my phone near me all day. I do think it is going to be a challenge for me though because it is a part of my routine.	I'm probably going to consume as much as I can this next week. I don't know...it just makes you feel like you're in the know.	So every other time I've said, "I'm going to take Facebook off of my phone. I'm going to stop looking at FB..." Somebody would show me something funny and I would put it back on.	I just start scrolling before I actually get out the bed and then every time I have some down time. It's kind of like automatic you know it's like second nature.
Performance	One thing I did find out is that I subconsciously go to social media. If my phone is in my hand, I'll just click on Facebook or Instagram or Pinterest.	It just makes you realize that while you enjoy social media you don't necessarily need it and it's more of a social activity that you have to manage appropriately.	I gained a realization that I waste a lot of time - a ton of time - like it made me mad. Those little 5, 10 to 15 minutes add up.	That first week was really hard because I would normally wake up and it's the first thing I do; I go to bed and that's the last thing I do. Now I'm like, what do I do?
Self-Reflection	I think for me the unplugging really helped me to be cognizant of what I'm doing with my time. I feel like I am on there more now but I'm still aware of the length of time.	Just restricting myself, being conscious of the restricting, and why I'm doing the restrictions. I'm just trying to stay in line with that.	I'm back to being addicted and it's like I never stopped I did change some of my habits but I'm not happy about how I returned back.	It's been terrible, I think I am on it more than ever now...day by day it just picked up.

Missing Current Events

Participants also discussed not interacting with family and friends as much while being unplugged from social media. Yvette mentioned it more than the other participants did and I assume it is has become their primary way to communicate with each other.

“My communication with family and friends has changed since being unplugged. I talk to majority of my family on social media. That is how I keep in contact with a lot of them.

While being unplugged, the frequency has definitely slowed, even with my good friends.”

However, not having social media as an outlet to communicate helped others. Nikita was able to reconnect with friends,

“I’m excited to say that I have remembered to call people that I’ve been meaning to catch up with for a long time. I’ve reconnected with people that I had strong, close friendships that I let fizzle out. It feels good to pick up with folks right where we left off.”

Although the emotions and reactions to missing current events were static, each participant response throughout the three phases shows that it affected everyone differently (see Table 5).

Table 5:

Quotes Regarding Missing Current Events During the Phases of SRL

	Kenya	Fallon	Nikita	Yvette
Forethought	If it’s a true friend I’m going to know. I don’t think I will miss out on anything relating to close friends and family.	I don’t think I’ll miss out. I think this is probably going to be great timing to be able to unplug because I am in the process of studying for the CPA Exam.	The foolishness that you see everyday that makes you laugh, right? That is what I will miss. I like seeing what everybody’s doing.	The only thing I’m going to miss out on is probably some family gossip because that’s the only way I keep in contact with family back home and in the neighborhood.
Performance	I wasn’t missing anything and I feel like if something pressing did come up they would have reached out to me on my phone because we talk and text.	I felt disconnected in a way because social media was the primary way that I would talk to my group so I just felt a bit of distance.	Everybody that was on social media while I was off had a problem to me. They needed to unplug too so I didn’t feel like I was missing out. I tried to shame them into unplugging.	I didn’t have FOMO until I actually unplugged and I wasn’t interacting with my family.
Self-Reflection	When I logged back in for the first time, I was thinking, “Let me get on here just to see what’s going on.” But once I got on, I was felt indifferent. I wasn’t missing out on anything; I can find a funny video that was posted weeks ago.	I was happy when I would see people that I want to know about.	I felt like I hadn’t missed anything. The same craziness is going on with the vaccines and the election so nothing changed. It didn’t get better, it got worse.	It just picked up. Literally one day it was like man everybody is funny today, then the next day it was a lot of deaths. I also monitor FB for my mom, send her screenshots and let her know what’s going on with some of her friends.

Going Down the Rabbit Hole

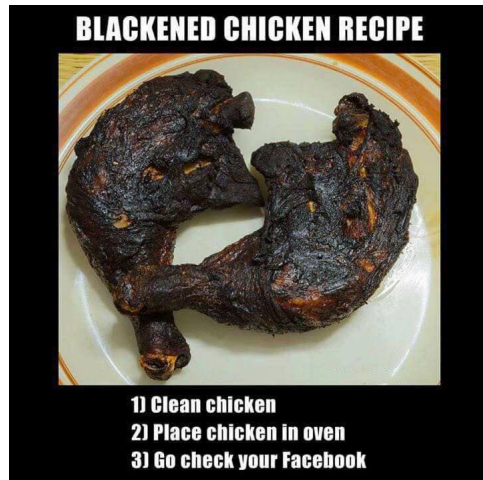
The term rabbit hole is a common term that was inspired by the famous book, *Alice in Wonderland*. The term rabbit hole is used when one thing leads you to another and then to another. Durmonskey (2022) defines it as, “caught up in intense topic-research phase that includes

going deeper and deeper in studying a particular subject plus, at some point, making a detour to other places that are completely unrelated to your first search.” When I think of the term rabbit hole, another common social media term I think of is time sink. Fallon stated, “It really just amazes me how you can plan to be on for a few minutes and it turns into an hour. I want to enjoy social media but not be consumed with it.” It is so easy to become consumed with social media because the rabbit hole never ends.

Nikita agreed with the time sink issue by saying, “I used to think I am filling time while waiting at a doctor’s office, restaurant or a kid’s dance lesson, and its true until I find myself sitting in my car in my driveway until I finish a video or vlog.” Social media can be used to fill downtime, but if it is not controlled, that time can spill over into other tasks. While unplugged, Nikita started to see how she was wasting her time as well. She said, “I honestly didn’t expect to learn anything from unplugging, I just wanted to take a much-needed break. I did find that I waste my time on social media, which doesn’t allow me to be as effective and efficient at my tasks and goals as I want to be.” During a week one journal entry, she also recounted, “I have on more than one occasions read a person’s post which led me to click on a stranger’s post, then another and after a while finding myself wondering how and why I got to that point.” Yvette had a similar journal entry where she states, “I realized I spend waaaaayyyyyyyyy too much time on social media. So much so, I am not productive some days...Now, I am able to complete tasks without getting side tracked by frivolous scrolling.” Time sinking is such a well-known thing in

social media, that memes have been created poking fun at the fact that going on social media will distract you for a longer time than originally intended (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Time Sink Meme



Not all rabbit holes result in a time sink, sometimes the search can garner some great results and information. Fallon said she used some of her time on the professional network site, LinkedIn, to learn about what companies were doing, who was hiring, and to get to know more about people in her career field. Fallon had gotten two of her last three jobs through LinkedIn. Fallon shared how she could also get caught up in the rabbit hole:

“I may see someone post something that will intrigue me to research and find out more information about a situation or the person in general. Looking at their LinkedIn or other accounts to piece things together which then takes up more time of your day and you’re so focused on that one thing now that you can eat up a good chunk of time.”

By the self-reflection phase, participants seem to have discovered more about themselves in terms of going down the rabbit hole and falling into a time sink (see Table 6).

Table 6:

Quotes Regarding Going Down the Rabbit Hole During the Phases of SRL

	Kenya	Fallon	Nikita	Yvette
Forethought	I just want to go on a fasting from social media. It's just so easy to pick up the phone and just start scrolling through things.	I can get sucked in for extended amounts of time if I don't watch it.	I am not spending my time unfocused because I'm looking for the next crazy thing.	It's easy to be unproductive when you're on social media all the time...that's when I feel myself hitting that wall.
Performance	I missed sending things to friends, digging deeper and researching other stuff that I find on social media.	So I go look at one thing online but then I go look up this other thing and it turns into a whole 30 minutes from this one post that I received.	What I gained is a realization that I waste a lot of time of time. Like a ton of time and it made me mad.	I would say it slowed down a lot as opposed to just scrolling for hours.
Self-Reflection	Just being more coniznt of how I'm using my time and how long I spend watching video after video	You can easily get down a rabbit hole. I have to try to limit myself. I think it gets to a point too where you're scrolling you can sense that it's aimless.	I am now intentional about looking at the time. If I've seen that I've been on for a while, I'll think, "Let me put this down, this is too much..."	It can easily consume your life especially if you have nothing going on or nothing to do. It's easy to say I'm going to just sit here and scroll, read or send stuff.

Negative Feelings About Social Media

There was an array of feelings throughout the two-week unplugging. Participants went from happy to unplug all the way to counting down the time until they could return to their favorite apps. In a journal entry, Kenya shared that social media has made her sad in the past.

“Social media often makes me sad. From hate, to misfortunes, it is everywhere. It is one of the reasons why I chose to participate in this study. Just to give my emotions a break from the everyday senseless acts. However, on the flipside, there are a lot of uplifting and practical jokes that get me laughing.”

Fallon shared similar feelings about being unconnected to social media and not feeling the pressure to post or engage.

“Even when I’m on social media, I have friends that post often and sometimes I think so myself, ‘man, that feels exhausting’ to have to go through their stories and see that they post 10+ clips daily. I mean, they are things that are important to them and I’m not judging. I would consider myself a lurker if you will and I don’t necessarily post because I don’t know that what I have to offer is post worthy.”

Fallon went on to write about how she feels as if she does not have to share everything and some things can be private. She can decide what to share and when. That is one of the true benefits of social media – you can control your story and your consumption. In a later journal entry, she wrote, “I have also felt sad or wanting to disconnect because of a lot of negative imaging on social media. During the summer of 2020, at the height of the protests, being bombarded with lots of images and all these action items made me angry then sad and made just want to disconnect.”

Yvette also wrote about how social media can make her feel.

“It does not make me sad in the sense of comparison to other people’s lives but it does make me sad in the sense of now being able to witness unfortunate events such as racism, abuse, neglect or mistreatment. I would always hear about incidents through a third party, but in this new age, everything is being recorded. Hearing stories like that, or another black man being murdered at the hands of the police, heck even ‘Karen’ encounters all make me feel sad. Sometimes it becomes too much and I have to just log off and do something else.”

After listing all the benefits of unplugging, later in the same journal entry Yvette wrote, “My two weeks is almost up. I’m on the countdown now. Three more days!” When asked if she would consider deleting her LinkedIn account, she responded, “It is only enhancing and expanding. It is the new normal. Even if YOU are not on there every day, EVERYBODY else is on there. It is inevitable. Jobs use it to post openings, businesses use it for promotion, and artists use it to sell their creations. It is just the way of the world now.” With more and more startups, small businesses are using the wide reach of social media and its low costs to promote their products.

There was definitely a pull in both directions as participants coped with being withdrawn from social media (see Table 7). Nikita experienced similar feelings,

“When I think about it now that I’m off of social media, I think of it as a waste of time, yet I still want to see what craziness is going on with it. The dichotomy of my true feelings about social media is confusing and I’m starting to think that social media has evolved so that folks on social media feel this way (and maybe unplugging is making me paranoid).”

When asked what she likes most about Facebook, Nikita had negative feelings on that topic as well,

“At one time I enjoyed communicating with old friends and family I had lost touch with. I enjoyed seeing milestones, trips and growing families. Now, FB has become a breeding ground for negativity, politics and advertising.”

Nikita also wrote about the emotional effects social media has on her life:

“Social media is filled with videos and stories of fights, natural disasters, racism, etc. and it’s all happening in real time. Access to this all the time is gut wrenching and it gets old. I probably cry at least once a week due to the stories and videos I come across.”

Another entry by Kenya confirms similar feelings of unease when it comes to social media. “I used to enjoy posting pictures of my children. Now, I choose not to post my children from the fear of thinking what others may be capable of; screen shots and sharing photos to make memes of my children.”

Table 7:

Quotes Regarding Negative Feelings During the Phases of SRL

	Kenya	Fallon	Nikita	Yvette
Forethought	I really hate it that a phone is such a crutch. It's just so easy to pick up the phone and just start scrolling through things when I could be engaging more with my family.	I feel like sometimes I get or have gotten sucked into social media in a way that it kind of produced a negative feeling in me like looking at other people and what they're doing.	My relationship with social media is toxic and my kids notice. Sometimes when I check Facebook in the morning, I get off and I sit there depressed for five to six minutes.	I know I'm killing my mind...still though... but yeah...I should just not do it.
Performance	Normally I would have my phone in my hand and would be disconnected from the family...it's funny, connected to the web but disconnected from real life.	I thought about unplugging all together for an extended period of time by deactivating my account for six months to a year to see what other productive habits I can pick up.	I'm not impacted by the negativity that comes with social media...anymore everything is breaking news and it keeps you on high alert.	I knew I spent too much time on it but that really made me si back and think like yeah you spend way too much time because you would have done a lot of [] within that time you know
Self-Reflection	Honestly, all this technology and everything that we have is a form of an addiction to me. People can't even drive nowadays without looking at their phone.	You're not even getting any joy out of this so it's just like let's do something else.	I thought it was almost shameful how much I get on it and I'm about to open myself back up to it and it was actually easy to stay off.	It's been terrible. I think I'm on it more than ever now. I totally like taking a mental break from work but then I'm mentally exhausted from looking at social media all day.

Benefits of Unplugging

This theme was probably the most consistent because it was evident throughout the full 28 days of journaling. Even with the negative feelings that the participants experienced, it was clear to see the benefits that unplugging had on the participants lives. By unplugging, participants experienced all the positive things that come with unplugging and being disconnected: better connections, being present in the moment, better time management and increased personal time all making the list. However, the term and concept used the most was the ability to get more things done. Fallon stated, “I don’t find myself aimlessly looking online to find something to occupy my time with. I am trying to be more thoughtful with what I am doing in order to accomplish some things that I would normally put off until the last minute.” In another journal entry she went on to say, “I’ve also felt more present. Once I check my email and text messages, I put my phone up to give my attention to what I was doing. I also feel like things that I would always put off to do later I am tackling sooner because it seems like I have the time to accomplish them now.”

During week one, Yvette also credited unplugging for being more productive at the office. “I can admit - unplugging has me more focused at work this week. I have been able to catch up in some of my work and get organized.” Nikita also felt as if she was accomplishing more by unplugging. She said, “I have more time for my to-do list since unplugging. I feel like I am getting closer to my goal and not feeling behind or that I have wasted time doing other things outside of the task at hand by being on social media.” Kenya also felt like unplugging helped make time for other things. She wrote, “Since unplugging, I have truly been able to take a step back and see how busy I am with work & kids. Eliminating social media has helped me rather than caused a pause. I am actually enjoying it.”

Participants experienced better connections outside of immediate family and children. Yvette was having a hard time adjusting without social media but felt better once her cousin called her. She wrote, “My morning routine of hopping on social media is almost out of my system. I did not think about it too much today, however, I did talk to my cousin first thing this morning so I’m sure that helped.”

Another benefit of unplugging was participants experiencing less fear. Nikita shares her experience through her journal entry:

“I noticed that while being unplugged, I’m less anxious about what’s going on outside of my four walls. I have not read much negativity and/or fear mongering online and it makes me happy. Not engaging in social media paired with me not having cable has helped me remain clam about the world I’m raising my children in.”

In a later journal entry, she continued, “It’s okay not to know EVERYTHING that’s going on in the world all day every day. Since I’ve been unplugged, I don’t get terrified by the politics of the day. I like the feeling of starting my day with a clear mind; it sets me up to have a good day”

There were numerous benefits identified by participants during the two-week study (see Table 8). For instance, Yvette noted that her sleeping habits had improved since unplugging. She wrote, “I have only been at this for three days, but I feel like I am sleeping better at night without being on social media all night before bed.” By the end of the study, Fallon did not feel as pressured to interact on social media. She wrote, “I don’t really feel the pressure to consistently update and add photos to my page anymore and I know there are different ways to enjoy social media or take part in it without having to be submersed in it.” Meanwhile, Kenya felt more at

peace during her unplugging. She stated, “I have just been sitting in silence and enjoying doing nothing. I have been catching myself zoning out but strangely, I don’t mind it.” Nikita had a similar reaction to unplugging. She reflected by saying, “Had it not been for the study I wouldn’t have stopped engaging in and/or watching social media. However, this two-week detox was good for me.”

Table 8:

Quotes Regarding Benefits of Unplugging During the Phases of SRL

	Kenya	Fallon	Nikita	Yvette
Forethought	I use social media to help me get in, you know, a happy little mood - excited mood - to go to work.	I feel like it's always good to unplug at some point and this is going to be great timing to be able to unplug because I am in the process for studying for the CPA exam.	I'll be grateful I'm not not looking at that (social media) and I'm not spending my time unfocused	I need to unplug. It's definitely going to help me.
Performance	I am having more intentional and more meaningful conversations with my family. Prior to unplugging, I would find myself saying "okay yeah" to my 9 year old, but we have actually been having good conversations.	I guess being a little more detached from my phone and knowing that there's no need for me to look at it as frequently. Being able to be detached in that way was the best part.	The best part of the day was eating dinner with my family. I was unplugged and we would really talk and I listened more intently to them.	I've noticed I was more focused at work because I'm not just sitting there taking those mini breaks throughout the day.
Self-Reflection	I've been having more dance sessions with the kids because I love to dance and that doesn't require our phones. We just have a little bit more true interactions with each other.	It probably took me at least a week to recognize the benefits of being unplugged and just seeing how my habits have changed.	That is something that has maintained...as a matter of fact I just got finished duo-ing with my oldest daughter. We still have those deep conversations.	I can get more things done. I am a little bit more energized and went to sleep earlier...stuff like that.

Future Approach

One last theme that all the participants had in common was that they all had plans for how they planned to unplug and consume social media upon their return (see Table 9). Yvette wrote, “I have learned I need to do some restructuring of my time and make better use of it. I have learned the time I have used reading someone else’s life, was time I could have used working on mine.”

There are several ways that you can limit your time online. You can set usage limits on your phone, delete the app so it takes longer to access, or even removing the app from your home screen so you don’t see it every time you use your phone. Fallon plans to use such tools to keep limit her time online,

“I want to continue to set limits for myself when it comes to consuming social media. I plan to put the limits back on my phone with allowing a certain amount of hours each day for these online platforms and also making my apps inaccessible after a certain time at night so I can get better rest and take better care of myself overall.”

For others, it was a chance to learn more about themselves. Nikita stated, “I guess I can safely say that unplugging from social media helped me mind my business and stay in my lane.” Not only did participants learn about themselves, they learned life lessons as well.

Table 9:*Quotes Regarding Future Approach/Unplugging During the Phases of SRL*

	Kenya	Fallon	Nikita	Yvette
Forethought	It will probably take me a day or two to get in the groove of being unplugged.	I might notice that I've been online a lot lately and need to pull back. If the initial pull back doesn't work, I will unplug altogether.	I enjoy watching everyone go on trips, have beautiful meals and weddings but I know that subconsciously I envy some of those things.	I know I can just catch myself on social media too much. I do need to unplug.
Performance	I will definitely do a social media fasting or something like it in the future.	I would recommend unplugging because I think it allows time to be more productive and be more present in situations.	I know that I'm addicted, but I also know I will be fine without it.	You can get so wrapped up into it that you forget how to really interact with people face to face.
Self-Reflection	I would recommend unplugging at least once a month like a detox.	Just restricting myself, being conscious of the restrictions and why I'm doing it.	It is almost shameful how much I get on it and I'm about to open myself back up to it.	I think everyone should unplug. I couldn't tell you how long but I definitely think stepping away from it every now and then is beneficial.

Self-Regulated Learning Phases While Unplugging***Forethought***

While preparing to unplug for two weeks, the participants shared the thoughts that went into preparing to remove themselves from social media. Participants made preparations that ranged from bingeing social media before unplugging, doing a mock unplugging, telling friends and family that they are leaving social media and deleting the app as not to be tempted once unplugged.

It was very interesting that during the forethought phase, three of the four participants planned to binge on social media during the days leading up to the unplugging. Participants planned to binge on social media before unplugging for two weeks as a way to consume as much

social media as possible. Prior to unplugging, Fallon stated, “I’m probably going to consume as much as I can this next week....I don’t know...it just makes you feel like you’re in the know.” She went on to explain how she felt like she would not miss out on as much if she consumed as much as possible. Yvette stated, “I’ll probably just get as much social media in as I can...just kind of binge on it.” And she was not the only one that felt that way. Fallon had similar plans, she said, “I think I am probably going to consume as much as I can this next week.” When asked what consuming would do for her, she replied, “I don’t know...it just makes you feel like you’re in the know.”

It is common tradition before you unplug and leave social media that you tell your friends and family so they will not think you are ignoring them. Due to the fact that social media is the primary way for Yvette to connect and talk with her family and friends who live in another state, she thought she needed to prepare them for her departure. She said, “I got a few people that I send stuff to; like all the time - like every day. I need to tell them, ‘Hey don’t send me nothing because I’m going to be unplugged for two weeks.’” However, Fallon (who would normally tell her social media circle that she is unplugging) said that she didn’t feel the need to tell her circle this time around. “I don’t think I’m going to make an announcement because it’s not going to be for more than two weeks.” As more social media apps are introduced; social media breaks and routine unplugging’s will become more common. Instead of social media embracing those breaks, meme creators (who, as an unspoken rule, speak for all of social media) are now asking users to just leave quietly without an announcement (see Figure 6). Although everyone has their own style, it is up to the user to decide if and when they alert their followers when they take breaks.

Figure 6:

Unplugging Announcement Meme



Although there are other outlets through which individuals can stay informed during the unplugging, several participants expressed concern about missing current events. They were not only concerned about news stories, they were also concerned about what they were missing out on while not being connected. I can only assume that the participants were referring to the latest scandals, gossip, videos and trends online. Kenya stated in her first interview that she was not concerned about missing out “the real news” since she has “CNN on for most of the day.” She went on to say, “If it’s a true friend, I am going to know anyway just from talking to them and texting.” While Nikita also admitted that she “will miss the everyday foolishness that makes you laugh.” On the other hand, not everyone was concerned about missing social media trends. Yvette made it clear that by being unplugged, she would be missing out on current events in her hometown and with her family. “The only thing that I will miss out on is some family gossip because that’s the way I really keep in contact with my family back home and it’s how I know what’s going on in the neighborhood.” So, although social media can be used for entertainment,

many use it to stay connected to people that are not close in proximity. Staying connected to her family was very important to Yvette and she made that clear from the beginning of the study. Luckily, she was able to stay connected by calling and texting family instead. I inquired why her family's chosen method of communication is through social media and not by cell phone. Yvette cleared it up by saying, "I can easily call them, I just don't want to. I'd rather see what you posted and then keep doing my business." Being able to see photos also and talking with her family helps Yvette feel as if she were there.

There was originally a different date decided upon for Yvette to unplug, however, once that day came she realized that she logged on to social media out of habit. Due to this, she ended up calling that a false start and she set a new date to unplug. Kenya had the same concerns that she would want to revisit social media after unplugging. In her initial interview, she stated:

"To help me mentally transition I will probably just start doing whatever the process is with journaling and everything prior to the day of actually doing it. That way, if I did just feel the urge to get on it I could peak real quick. But you know, when the real two weeks happen then I think I'll be okay."

She also believed that it would take her a day or two to get into the "groove" of not getting on social media, so she wanted to take any precautions she could to prepare.

At the initial interview, participants all stressed that they were addicted to social media and they welcomed the break for various personal reasons. During the first interview, all of the participants commented on how much a break from social media was needed due to the amount of time spent online. The participants start their morning online and most end their day with it. "I just start scrolling before I actually get out of the bed

and then every time I have some down time. It's kind of automatic you know like second nature that I just grab my phone," said Yvette. Nikita said something similar in her first interview,

"I wake up in the morning and the first thing I do is turn over and see what's going on with Facebook; what craziness is going on in the world... I bring my phone with me wherever I go so I can keep abreast of to the foolishness on Facebook."

It is during down time at work or at home, that participants really noticed their social media usage. Kenya said, "Social media is my 'get away' when I need a quick mental 'get away' from work. In fact, all participants alluded to the fact that they used social media to fill up their time or take a break from work. During the first days of unplugging, a few participants wrote about not knowing what to do with the additional time on their hands. Yvette said, "I was more focused at work because I'm not just sitting there taking those mini breaks during the day. But when I come back home, then it hits me again that I'm not on social media." She mentioned that after her errands are ran, if she is not in the mood for television, there is nothing else to do. This is a common feeling of those who have nothing but social media to fill their time (see Figure 7).

All participants referred to getting online to do one thing but being distracted by social media and staying online for longer than planned. This is possibly connected to the fact that all of the participants could be considered "lurkers" due to the fact that none of them post very often on social media but they all complained about the amount of time they spent online. Fallon admitted, "I can get sucked in for extended amounts of time if I don't watch it." Yvette complained about the amount of time that she spent online in each of her interviews, "I could be on there at least 15-20 minutes at a time and some days I look up and I've been online for like an

hour.” Nikita agreed by saying, “It was almost an involuntary action. Every time I get a break, every time there is a quiet moment in a meeting and when my husband and kid’s stories get too long, I’m looking for something to capture my attention. I realized I am addicted.”

Figure 7:

Quitting Social Media Meme



When asked in the initial interviews how often the participants use social media, it was discovered that most of them check social media all throughout the day. Literally, it is the first thing in the morning they check all the way into the night before they go to bed. They also admitted to checking social media no matter what other tasks need to be completed. Yvette confessed, “Social media doesn’t help with my procrastination. I will know I have something to do, but will STILL waste my time frivolously scrolling through social media. Like for no reason at all. I just don’t want to handle my business at the moment.” Fallon stated, “It really just amazes me how you can plan to be on for a few minutes and it turns into an hour. I want to enjoy social media but not be consumed with it.” It is so easy to become consumed with social media because the rabbit hole never ends.

Yvette confirms that social media is simply just a part of her daily routine, “When I have down time, I am wondering what I am missing or did ‘so-in-so’ post something today? Some

people like to come home after work and relax with a cold beer; I unwind by ‘dumbing down’ and hopping on social media.” When you are constantly engaging with social media, it can easily become a habit. Yvette said,

“It was like second nature. I did it without thinking. Throughout the day, every time I picked up my phone, I searched for FB and IG. It’s like an addiction of sorts. Without social media, my phone is now JUST a phone.”

The entertainment found on social media is a big part of what draws people in and keeps them connected. Nikita recalled why she always returns to social media, “Every other time I’ve said I’m going to take Facebook off my phone, somebody would show me something funny and then I would put it back on.”

Due to the entertainment factor and the urge to click on the app, one last safeguard that was made by the participants was to completely delete the app from their phones. Because of the “automatic” desire to constantly use the phone to check social media, three of the four participants mentioned deleting the app in their first interview as not to be tempted to get online during their unplugging. Their hope was if they had to go through a web browser to log on that they would remember they shouldn’t be on social media and would immediately stopped. They felt they needed to remove the social media apps from their phone to completely stay off social media. In interview one, Yvette shared her plans to unplug, “I will delete the apps off my phone so I won’t even be tempted to even look at it. Deleting the app will make me more conscious of my decision.” Meanwhile, Nikita planned to delete her apps in the interest of the study, “I’m just going to remove it off my phone, as well as my tablet, so it’s not accessible to me.” It is interesting that the participants felt they needed some sort of failsafe to keep them off of social

media. This, again, speaks to the persistent need to check social media even when they know they should not be logged in. This was also evident in the fact that Yvette needed to restart her two-week unplugging because she could not make it through her first day.

Table 10:
Forethought Commonalities between Participants

	Kenya	Fallon	Nikita	Yvette	Renee
Needs a Practice Unplugging	X			X	X
Will Delete the App		X	X	X	N/A
Will Inform Followers about Hiatus				X	X

After participating in the forethought interviews, I noted that I was concerned if the participants who never unplugged would be able to remain off of social media. The group consisted of three participants who previously unplugged, but there were also two heavy social media users who had no experience unplugging. As mentioned in Chapter Three, I believed that those who had unplugged before would not have any issues disconnecting. However, I was very surprised that the people who had an issue were the two that previously unplugged. Yvette needed to restart her unplugging experience because she was so used to starting her day with social media that she jumped on the first day of her first unplugging. In addition, Renee mentioned in her first interview that she was concerned about being able to unplug from GroupMe because of a support group that she participates in. I am unsure if she made it without any issue because Renee stopped responding to follow-up interview requests.

Coincidentally, Yvette mentioned that she needed to a mock unplugging before the actual event. Kenya and Fallon both mentioned doing mock unplugging to start to wean themselves off before the unplugging as a way to help them prepare to unplug. Kenya was the only participant

that felt like she didn't need to delete her app, but after clicking on the app out of habit the first day of the unplugging (she promised that the app didn't load) she decided to remove it.

Performance

During the actual unplugging, participants performed their removal from social media with few hiccups. I would be happy to report that no one looked at social media during the two weeks, however, two participants told me they went online during the first few days. Both situations were brief, where they realized what they had done or the app was still loading, but it speaks to the habitual and consistent use of social media. Which, in the end, is why participants decided to remove the app from their various devices. During this phase of self-regulated learning, participants unplugged, found ways to occupy their time, had better performance at work, better communication at home and found themselves not constantly picking up their phones.

A common slang term used when referencing social media is FOMO (the fear of missing out), which is a common trend in social media when people are offline or unplug but feel like they are missing out. Although some participants emphasized in the initial interview that they were not worried about missing anything online, at some point during their journaling, they declared otherwise. Kenya simply stated on her first day of unplugging that she missed social media for the void it filled while Nikita joked that she missed social media as a way to ignore her long to-do list. During week one, Fallon stated, "I know my friends are sending me funny videos or I could be missing out on what someone posted in their stories that was informative or that resonated with me." This was a common theme during week one as Yvette also started feeling as if she was missing something from unplugging:

“I’m sure I have missed some people’s birthdays – because to be honest, these days, that’s the only way to know if a person has a birthday coming up. I miss social media. I want to see what my favorite celebs are up to, what life hack I can try, what new recipe I should attempt, what gossip I missed and what the fake ballers are lying about this week.”

By her third day of unplugging, Yvette started reflecting on if she missed social media. She wrote, “I miss the foolishness of social media but it doesn’t add any value to my life. It isn’t vital to my existence. I am realizing that now.” The “foolishness” Yvette is referring to is all of the drama, memes, up-to-date commentary and laughs associated social media. Each participant mentioned the entertainment aspect that social media provides to their daily lives.

In journal entries, participants would write about the freedom of not always being connected to a phone. At the beginning of the study, participants wrote about peace in their homes and what they planned to do with their new-found free time. However, as the study went on, more and more entries included commentary on what they felt that they were missing being disconnected from social media. Yvette shared in her second interview, “That first week was hard because I was used to waking up and it was the first thing I would do...I didn’t have FOMO until I unplugged and wasn’t interacting with my family...I started thinking about people I really only talked to on social media.” Later during the unplugging, Yvette changed her mind about what she was actually missing out on. As time went on, the feeling of missing out changed. Towards the end of the unplugging, she wrote in her journal,

“While being unplugged, I do feel like I am experiencing FOMO... but what or why, I don’t know. Every time I’m on social media, I will tell myself, ‘same shit, different day’

– I don't know why I waste my time! I guess it's the unknown that has me in fear. I THINK I'm missing out, and as a result, convinced myself that I AM, when in reality, I KNOW I'm not."

Although the participants felt like they were missing out, not one participant lapsed and went online during the unplugging, however, each participant recounted how hard it was to stay off of social media with all of the temptation to get online. There were memes, links and posts being sent inside chat groups. Between that and the temptation of clicking the link itself, several participants deleted the app so they would not think about getting online. Even though Yvette deleted the app from her phone she later found out that she missed one, "I received a message on Facebook Messenger today, and didn't realize I still had the app on my phone. So, to eliminate the temptation, I deleted that app too." Even when the participants were doing their best to unplug and disengage from all social media, there were notifications and emails that tried to lure them back online. Yvette shared her experience, "I have been receiving emails from Instagram saying, 'Hey (insert social media handle), see what you missed' or 'you have a new notification' I admit I did click the link in the email to see what it would do, but since I deleted the app, I couldn't go far."

The temptation of getting on social media was also fueled by family and friends who were not aware of the project. Even with deleting the app, participants wrote about links being sent through text and/or group messages. Participants reported feeling "left out" of the conversation because they were unable to click the link as a part of their commitment to unplugging. Yvette even replied to a text with a simple "LOL" to pacify her cousin who sent the link as not to alienate herself even more. Fallon reflected during her performance interview by saying, "The only issue I had was in my group chats. People would text me or send me things

and say look at this post. I would have to write back and tell them I can't look or see what it is because I'm unplugged." I wonder if the participants were not participating in the study and just unplugged for personal reasons – if they still would have insisted on not checking the links.

During week one, Yvette also credited unplugging for being more productive at the office. "I can admit - unplugging has me more focused at work this week. I have been able to catch up in some of my work and get organized." Nikita also felt as if she was accomplishing more by unplugging. She said, "I have more time for my to-do list since unplugging. I feel like I am getting closer to my goal and not feeling behind or that I have wasted time doing other things outside of the task at hand by being on social media." Kenya also felt like unplugging helped make time for other things. She wrote, "Since unplugging, I have truly been able to take a step back and see how busy I am with work & kids. Eliminating social media has helped me rather than caused a pause. I am actually enjoying it."

Participants frequently referenced the newfound hobbies used to occupy their time during the unplugging. Fallon shared, "I am playing more virtual scrabble games and checking my LinkedIn for articles about different industries, I think this has been positive as it is not mindless information that I am consuming." Other participants mentioned playing games on their phones, reading more and spending more time with loved ones. Yvette recalls, "In addition to playing candy crush more, I noticed I have been reading more news articles. I am up to date on current events these days. I am googling more and online shopping."

Nikita had a few revelations during her unplugging because she asked her kids to tell her when she was not listening or paying attention due to her social media usage.

“I learned that my kids watch me closer than I thought and that I kind of don’t like my favorite social media platform. As a result of these revelations, I decide to be a more diligent listener, a more engaged friend and make sure to honor my priorities before engaging in social media.”

Kenya had a similar experience with her kids. She journaled and discussed how her communication with her sons improved once she was off of social media and focused on having intentional conversations.

During the initial interview, before unplugging, Kenya stressed in her journal writings that social media was for “entertainment purposes only” and was used for mental breaks throughout the work day. During week two of unplugging she wrote, “For me, social media outside of LinkedIn is for entertainment only. As each day passes, the more I just really don’t care to be on these sites anymore. The thrill is not there for me as much as it used to be.” She also wrote about how unplugging is giving her eyes a break from looking at a computer screen all day (ironic, right?) and gives her the mental breaks she needs throughout the day. Despite the fact that Kenya uses social media primarily for entertainment, she did not write about missing social media; instead she wrote about the frustration of working more hours since she didn’t have something else to focus on throughout the day. “I feel like I already work a lot but without my distraction I just feel like I was working even more. After I logged out of work, I realized I didn’t get up to take a lunch, breaks or anything...I just worked.” Yvette also expressed happiness and frustration that she was more attentive at work without social media. “I noticed I was more focused at work because I’m not just sitting there taking these mini breaks throughout the day. But then, I come back home and then it hits me again – I’m not on social media.” Later in the

interview she confessed, “I totally like taking a mental break from work but then I’m mentally exhausted from just looking at social media all day.”

Being unplugged from social media also allowed the participants to reflect on the time spent on social media in their daily lives. Yvette elaborates on what she learned:

“A life lesson that I learned this week was to stop wasting so much time. I have thought about all of the time I have wasted scrolling through my social media newsfeed and I realized I have lost a lot of hours of my life for nothing. Sometimes looking at people I did not know, living their lives.”

The acknowledgement occurred to everyone at different points during the project, but each participant made reference to the time they had wasted being on social media. Not only did participants learn about themselves, they learned about their habits. Participants discussed how even being online for a short amount of time can still be detrimental. Fallon continues on, “While I don’t think I’ve saved a whole 24 hours of time yet, I know that I haven’t gotten lost in scrolling for an hour or so when I should be doing something more productive.”

During week two of unplugging, it occurred to Nikita how much time she had been wasting, “I’m starting to see that social media is a distraction that has been keeping me from completing tasks and accomplishing goals in a timely manner.” Meanwhile it took Fallon a little longer to miss social media since she was focused on her CPA exam. “I think got to study more and was more focused because I didn’t have a lot of breaks in between. If I did take a break it was replying to a friend versus looking on social media and that 30 minutes turning into an hour.” Nikita was also able to fill her time with other things once she unplugged. “After work I can say that I probably talked to my kids more. I had them come in the room with me and you

know, hang out.” In a journal entry Yvette stated, “Since unplugging I have more time for everything. I have noticed without being preoccupied by my phone, the day doesn’t ‘get away from me’ as the old people say.” During week two when she realized how much she had actually completed on her to do list, Nikita wrote, “I look forward to seeing how long I can keep this up!”

Towards the end of unplugging period, Kenya wrote, “When the study is over I have to make a conscious effort to limit my time on social media each day.” In another journal entry written during unplugging in week two she continued, “When I plug back in, I will be more cognizant of my time. I will NOT allow myself to get back into that place of being plugged in ALL day long. I will put my phone down and limit the time spent on there each day. Doing this study has shown me that I’m not into social media how I used to think I was. It’s more of a habit than a want for me.” Judging by her journal entries, I believe that she would quit social media if she found a similar outlet as entertaining as Facebook.

Table 11:
Performance Commonalities between Participants

	Kenya	Fallon	Nikita	Yvette
Better Sleep	X	X	X	X
Work Productivity	X	X	X	X
Better Family Interactions	X	X	X	

After completing the performance interview, which happened right after the unplugging, I noted that all of the participants seemed happy with the whole unplugging experience. When asked if they would all unplug again, they all gave an astounding yes. The participants could not agree on how often an unplugging should happen, but they did all agree that they are necessary. They also liked the idea of the two-week unplugging for research purposes, but none of the participants wanted to complete another two weeks.

The first days of the unplugging shined a lot of light on how much the participants used social media on a regular basis. It took them all different times to adjust to their new normal, but once they did it seemed like it was smooth sailing except for everyone except Yvette. I am not sure if it was her social media usage that she missed or if it was truly because that was her primary way to connect with her family. I noted that I thought her issue was FOMO since she did mention in a journal article that she and her cousin spoke on the phone during the unplugging. Why not close that gap by calling or texting a family member to check in? I also found it interesting that Kenya admitted that she didn't talk on the phone much during her unplugging. However, she believed that regularly seeing people on social media would remind her to reach out to friends and family and helped her interact with them more. It had an opposite effect on Nikita as she was able to connect with old friends she lost touch with.

I also made note that the participants went out of their way to unplug. For instance, Kenya, who usually worked with her phone right next to her kept her phone in the "back room." Fallon enjoyed being able to be "more detached" from her phone. She said that was "the best part" and she didn't feel "stressed" trying to keep up with someone through social media. Social media does not stress me out, but two of the participants wrote about the negative feelings they feel at times on social media.

All participants spoke of better performance at work but it never sounded like a positive comment. In each interview, the participant would say, "I did do more work" and you could hear the contempt in their voice. In interview two, Yvette joked by saying, "I'm actually working at work!" She also mentioned that she loved taking "mental break" at work but when she did, she would be exhausted from looking at social media all day. Comments like that made me wonder

how much of the participant's day was spent on social media if they were able to see clear improvement in their output once they unplugged.

Self-Reflection

Participants were interviewed a month to a month and a half after returning to social media and the self-reporting on social media usage varied between participants. During this phase, participants returned to social media after unplugging for two weeks. Some participants were excited to return online while others were hesitant to fall back into their old habits. The results are that some participants began to set limits for themselves while surfing online and other participant's usage returned to where it was prior to unplugging.

Fallon did not add the apps immediately back to her phone as she wanted to keep the temptation of social media distraction away a while longer while she prepared for her exam. "That lends me not wasting time unexpectedly from going on social media to look at one thing but then turning into looking at things for an hour or more." she explains.

Kenya constantly stressed in her interviews and journal entries that social media helped give her mental breaks from work during the day. After asking if she would unplug permanently, she admitted, "That's one thing I would miss if I just completely unplugged because it does bring some type of balance for me to get my mind off work, even just for 5 minutes." Kenya is still in the process of finding a happy medium between working and taking those much-needed breaks. While unplugged, she confessed, "After I logged out of work I realized that I didn't get up and take a lunch." As she continued she stated, "I don't even know if I got up to use the restroom – I'm sure I did – but I don't even think I took breaks or anything."

Not only were mental breaks missing from participant's daily lives, but they also missed out on participating in chat groups while unplugged. Group chats were hard to navigate at times because none of the participants shared that they would be doing a two-week unplugging project with their group members. Participants felt as if they missed out on important conversations, group content and gossip. Fallon shared her experience, "In group chats people have sent tweets or posts from IG (in reference to a joke or as part of a topic we are discussing), and I wasn't able to indulge or be part of the convo fully because of that."

Even after returning to social media and adding the apps back to her phone, Nikita realized it was the wrong thing to do, "I should probably get rid of all the apps on my phone (again). I would get much more done in a day and be so much better at time management if I didn't have my phone with apps as a distraction." But even after making that observation, Nikita kept the newly returned apps on her phone.

An entry by Kenya confirms her feelings of unease once she returned to social media. "I used to enjoy posting pictures of my children. Now, I choose not to post my children from the fear of thinking what others may be capable of - screen shots and sharing photos to make memes of my children." Social media can be a scary place because of screen shots, pedophiles, and the harsh things that people say about the things you post. To combat this, some parents have decided not to post pictures of their children online or they will create a page to post pictures but limit access to friends and family. Shortly after unplugging, Kenya also wrote, "Doing this study has shown me that I'm not into social media how I used to think I was. It's more of a habit than a want for me. When Kenya reconnected to social media, she slowly eased back into social media and increased her usage over time.

When asked about what she learned about herself during her unplugging, Yvette responded by saying:

“I learned with the time wasted on social media every day, I could have been working on me – becoming more diligent in my job search, more disciplined in my fitness goals, more productive at work, more willing to finish household chores. I will just be lazy and lay around when I knew I had things to do; but I always found time to plug in and kill (waste) time.”

However, after returning to social media, Yvette started to fall back into her old consumption times. “After returning to social media, I did well with monitoring how long I was plugged in and made a conscious effort to not be on there for long periods of time. Now, I can find myself slowly getting sucked into the life of scrolling.” In her journal entry, Yvette wrote about trying to limit her time on social media,

“When I unplugged, I told myself I would limit myself, and I did for a while, but now that I’m all the way back, I haven’t. It’s no particular reason why I haven’t set rules for myself. If I have to be honest, it may be because I don’t want to hold myself responsible. Like I know I NEED to limit myself, but I really don’t want to.”

Table 12:*Self-Reflection Commonalities between Participants*

	Kenya	Fallon	Nikita	Yvette
Would Unplug Again	X	X	X	X
Would Delete Facebook	X	X	X	
Would Delete LinkedIn			X	
On More Now Than Before	X		X	X

During my last and final interview with the participants, the most interesting thing to me was how they all (except one) returned back to social media as heavier (or just as heavy) users. When I we talked Nikita sounded disappointed in herself and even considered deleting the app again to try to curve her usage. Yvette sounded defeated when she told me, “It been terrible, I think I’m on it more than ever now.” She had a game plan and told herself she would shut it down if she was on longer than an hour...well that lasted for two weeks and after that she was “back full-fledged” Kenya felt like she was on it more but she wondered if it was because she is more mentally conscious about the time she spends online.

Fallon was the only participant that did not return back fully to her social media activities. There is a strong possibility that the reason she did not return fully was because she was still studying for her exam and was a week out when her unplugging ended. However, she did mention that she had been back online, but it was through the web browser and not through the app. By making that small change, she can limit the amount of time she spends on social media. I think it was easiest for Fallon to disconnect because she has been on and off of social media intermittently for the last few years and has always been able to regulate her usage. She also mentioned that the only reason she is back on Facebook is because of the different Facebook

groups you can join. She joined one full of people studying for the same exam and she stays engaged because people post study guides and tips.

The unplugging caused a few positive changes in the daily lives of the participants that were directly influenced by the unplugging. As an example, Kenya does not allow phones at her dinner table anymore. That time is considered family time and she hoped the communication stays the same moving forward. She also puts her phone down now when her kids come to talk to her, when before she didn't. Nikita started to look at the clock to see how long she has been on instead of just scrolling aimlessly. She has also stopped scrolling before bed because she realized that when she puts her phone down, she falls asleep quicker. Yvette plans to continue to unplug once every 6 months or once a year. She is also trying to put the phone down when she knows she has something more important to do – sometimes it worked and sometimes it did not. Meanwhile, Fallon realized that she doesn't have to interact on social media if she doesn't want to. Sounding very pleased with her decision, she proudly told me "I don't have to like everything. I can literally do what I want to do and I don't have to feel pressure to do certain things," she said.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I examined the lived experiences of four African-American women who regularly used social media and unplugged for two weeks. I interviewed them before they unplugged (forethought), after they finished unplugging (performance), and a month after returning to social media (self-reflection). During the unplugging and after returning to social media, the participants journaled about their experiences for a total of 28 days. By using the information gathered in the interviews and the journal entries, I was able to read and learn about

their experiences. In this chapter, I also discussed the following six themes based on data analysis: habitual use, missing current events, going down the rabbit hole, negative feelings, benefits of unplugging, and future approach. Through the self-regulation lens, I showed the progression of the themes through each of the three self-regulated learning phases (see Tables 4-12). There were commonalities between the participants and their experiences as it relates to the three phases of self-regulated learning.

Chapter 5 - Conclusion and Implications

The purpose of this study was to explore how adults experience the act of “push back” through the process of unplugging from social media as it relates to the three phases of self-regulated learning: Forethought, performance and self-reflection. A group of four African American participants provided qualitative data by journaling and participating in interviews. They unplugged for two weeks total and engaged in journaling for a total of four weeks (two weeks during and two weeks after reengaging).

Summary of The Study

By analyzing the data collected through three interviews and twenty-eight journal entries, I identified the following six themes: habitual use, missing current events, going down the rabbit hole, negative feelings about unplugging, benefits of unplugging, and future approach towards social media. Throughout the journal entries, there were several references to being “addicted” to social media as well as social media being a “habit” and participant’s “non-stop use” of social media. Evidence of addiction and habitual use was found throughout all three phases of SRL (see Table 4). Participants also discussed missing current events and not interacting with family and friends as much while being unplugged from social media. Yvette was affected by this more than the other participants and I believe it is because that was her primary way to communicate with her family. A time sink is also another common reason for people to unplug. It is a common thing to get online and lose track of time while you are scrolling through the apps. Each participant mentioned the time wasted on social media. Negative feelings are also a common thing in social media. Users often talk about the negative feelings that it brings whether it is from depression, anxiety and loneliness. Another unanimous occurrence was each participant seeing the benefits of unplugging during the two-week time frame. Participants reported better

communication with immediate family, sleeping better and accomplishing more. Lastly, at the end of the research, each participant stated how they planned to return to social media and monitor their usage going forward. The self-reflection phase of the unplugging helped participants compare and contrast the differences in their lives when they are plugged in and when they are unplugged, thus giving everyone a plan on how to move forward.

To further understand the participants' self-regulated learning process throughout unplugging from social media, I mapped the six themes against the three SRL cyclical phases, namely, forethought, performance, and self-reflection. They are: *Forethought Phase*: (1) Habitual Use; (2) Missing Current Events; (3) Going Down the Rabbit Hole; *Performance Phase*: (3) Going Down the Rabbit Hole; (4) Negative Feelings; (5) Benefits of Unplugging; and *Self-Reflection Phase*: (5) Benefits of Unplugging; and (6) Future Approach. By mapping the themes, I saw a correlation between when the participant experienced the theme during the unplugging. In addition, two of the themes also overlap across the three phases of self-regulated learning. More specifically, in interview one (the forethought interview), the participants talked about why they wanted to unplug and also how they were addicted to social media. They also started to think about what they would be missing out on while being unplugged and reacted (i.e. telling friends that they would be away from social media, binging on content, etc.). By binging and using social media prior to unplugging, participants were going down the rabbit hole. In interview two (the performance interview) and corresponding journal entries, participants talked about looking for something to occupy their time with now that they were unplugged and disconnected from social media. Participants binged watched shows, became addicted to candy crush and used the internet to occupy their time.

At the start of the study, the participants all reported missing social media and being unaware of what was going on online. Several also reported that the first few days were the hardest as they adjusted to not being connected. However, as the two weeks went on the journals started to reflect the benefits of unplugging: better communication with children, a feeling of zen, better sleep, and time to do things they didn't have time to do before. During interview three (the self-reflection phase) and by referencing corresponding journal entries, it was clear that the participants could see the benefits of unplugging. Each participant wrote about returning to social media. Some wondered if they were still as interested in it; and once they did return participants also wrote and spoke about starting to pay attention to the time spent online and/or limiting usage by adjusting the settings on their phone.

Applying the self-regulated learning lens, the six themes definitely reflect the process. Self-regulated learning refers to an independent and self-motivated process of acquiring knowledge and skills and includes self-control and self-management. The participants acquired knowledge of their social media habits and usage by not only participating in the research, but through the reflective journal entries. They also gained skills that helped them stay unplugged (i.e removing the apps, not clicking on links) along with self-control and self-management during the research. The overlap of the themes helped me as a researcher understand the “cognitive, motivational, and emotional aspects of learning” (Panadero, 2017)” that the participants were experiencing and learning when going through this unplugging experience. All of the participants had different motivations for participating in the study. Nikita and Fallon were both using this experience to focus on more important things in their life like career and mental health, while Kenya and Yvette were interested in unplugging because of their extreme usage

times online. The cognitive and emotional aspect of learning is evident through thought, journaling and experience.

Discussion

Social media is a phenomenon in itself. It has changed how people communicate, interact, and gain information. However, due to the constant connectivity that social media offers, people are opting to unplug and pushback for a variety of reasons. A study conducted by Morrison and Gomez (2014) identified five primary motivations and behaviors related to the pushback. The behaviors identified can come from a variety of factors. “Primary pushback motivations comprise of emotional dissatisfaction, external values, taking control, addiction and privacy,” (p.13). That same year, Foot (2014) looked at five distinct desires as the primary reasons for pushback such as abstaining altogether, practicing time-bounds or reducing use in other ways. The five desires were (1) the desire for downtime, (2) the desire for more face-to-face relationships, (3) the desire to create a space for one's kids to enjoy traditional childhood activities, (4) the desire to reduce time spent on attention-seeking online noise and (5) the desire to retain or restore a sense of privacy. People are becoming addicted to social media from being constantly connected (Zhao & Zhou, 2021; Schivinski, 2020). Ultimately, they are also becoming unhealthy by constantly being plugged in and connected to their devices (Haynes, 2021).

Unplugging is important for those who use social media on a consistent basis. There are several benefits with being unplugged, but for someone who is addicted to social media or who has social media engrained into their daily lives, the negatives sometimes outweigh the positives. Therefore, unplugging is getting a lot of coverage due to reports of addiction to cell phones and social media accounts. Reasons for the addiction can be lack of friends, lack of socialization, and

monotony of life, as it continues, individuals continue to use it for keeping up with the events, feeling of fulfillment of duty, and protection of social relationships, etc. (Ramani et al., 2022). According to Morrison and Gomez (2014) addiction was one of the main factors as to why people were starting to pushback. “Primary pushback motivations comprise of emotional dissatisfaction, external values, taking control, addiction and privacy” (p. 13). Foot (2014) also listed the types of motivation for pushback are: (1) Emotional dissatisfaction; (2) External values; (3) Taking back control; (4) Addiction; and (5) Privacy. Addiction to social media provides a constant distraction to users who could be doing other things. Foot (2014) also revealed that users feel as if the technology is "stealing productive time” (p. 8). The research revealed that older and younger users have both admitted to feelings of addiction when it comes to social media.

Although staying “plugged into” social media keeps users in the know with friends, family, businesses, and news, the literature shows that media resistance is a growing phenomenon among various technology users who are looking for ways to push back and manage or reduce their dependence on technology (Foot, 2014; Portwood-Stacer, 2013; Woodstock, 2014). These findings were verified in my research. Each participant stated in their first interview that they all had a desire to unplug. The common consensus between all the participants were that they were (at varying levels) addicted to social media. The majority of the group were using it from first thing in the morning to the last thing at night. They all recognized that they needed a change and because of that, signed up to participate in the research.

Through this study, I noticed that the participants’ perceptions of social media use changed as they went through the three phases of self-regulated learning, which is consistent with the adult learning literature. Experience is two-fold; the actual performance of an action,

and the passive element relating to the consequences arising from the active element (Dewey, 2004). To learn from experience, one must develop a conscious rationalization both backwards and forward in time. The three-part interview allowed for the participants to reflect on their experience while being unplugged and provided them with the chance to discuss their experiences and realizations. The journals also provided a way for the participants to look back on the various insights experienced while unplugged. Both data collection methods allowed me to capture the interactions of the following three forms of SRL as identified in Zimmerman's (1986) Triadic Analysis Model: environment, behavior, and personal level. The model states that there is a triadic interaction between environment, behavior and person that is cyclic. In this study, the environment changed and the participants were unable to log on to social media. The behavior of the participants had to change for this to happen. Kenya changed her entire environment by not letting her kids eat at the dinner table with devices, once she changed the environment, her kids had to change their behavior. Nikita tried to do something similar by asking her husband and kids to participate in the challenge with her. Although they declined, if they had taken her up on her offer, her environment would have changed and her family's behavior would have had to change as well. Also, in the study, when the behavior of going online changed, the personal interactions between friends and family also changed. Of course, Yvette comes to mind because of her lack of interaction with her family. In contrast, Nikita was able to change her behavior and reach out to old friends to work on those personal relationships.

Houle (1980) further indicates that experiential learning is "education that occurs as a direct participation in the events of life" (p. 221), which was evidenced in this study. The participants of this study were all social media users in their everyday life. The participants all detailed in the first interview how they all would use social media throughout the day from the

time they woke up in the morning until they went to bed at night. Kenya, for example, was certain that she would not need to delete the app but a few days into the project when she realized she was going to the app out of habit, she went ahead and removed the app from her phone. Before experiencing the unplugging, she was certain that it would go one way, but once she was in the middle of it, she realized that she needed to do something differently than originally planned. Nikita wanted to use this time of unplugging to get ahead on her business plan for her new career. In her interview, she stated that she felt like her business plan would have gotten done either way but having that time to unplug gave her time to “work the numbers a little more” and provide several versions before she ultimately decided on her business plan.

After unplugging, everyone put their social media apps back on their phone. However, Fallon, knowing that she had another week before her exam, decided to wait a little longer before she added the app back on her phone. She decided to visit the site through the internet browser which let her choose when she visited the site, but it also gave her a chance to think about if she really needed to be online. Although she might have wanted to get back online, her self-control helped her stay off of social media when she really needed to focus. Boekaerts et al. (2005) believes that, “self-regulation refers to self-generated thoughts, feelings, and actions that are planned and cyclically adapted to the attainment of personal goals.” I believe that all these examples are examples of Boekaerts’ definition. These women took it upon themselves to see that something needed to be different, so mid-motion they changed the way they were going, adjusted and did what was best for them in towards the attainment of their personal goals.

Implications

Practice, Policy, and Theory

The results of a study by Chen and Kuo (2017) shows that if a person is not comfortable with the social media platform, they are less likely to use it. However, once they find it interesting and beneficial to visit a social platform, they do not hesitate to engage in social activities. This may be attributed to adult learners' SRL skills that are essential to managing the use of social media when planning or performing learning activities (Chokalingamet al., 2018). This is evident in my findings simply by the self-reporting of social media that is consumed. The participants find social media interesting and beneficial so they visit the sites daily, several times a day. The participants visit them so much that they needed to take a step away from social media to get a break. Social media has some addictive features such as endless scrolling, social pressure, behavioral suggestion, rewards system, and continuous streaming (Montag et al., 2019) that make users stay engaged and online.

Due to the fact that the implementation of social media with online education is ever changing, there needs to be more research done to look at ways to overcome the reluctance of social media usage and the need to unplug, which is why this study is timely. However, based on this study, it seems that there will always be a resistance against the implementation of social media in adult learning because it will become just another place to check in for those who are growing tired of social media. The participants of the study were ready to unplug because they had grown tired of being online and wanted to curve their daily usage. Nikita thought it was “a shame” how much time she spent on social media while Yvette mentioned that she spent a few hours online daily and had recalled falling asleep in the bed while scrolling. In similar cases with adult learners who want to take a step away from social media, integrating social media into

higher education might not accommodate everyone. For someone that suffers from addiction of social media, introducing it back into their life could be detrimental if they were trying to refrain from using it. In addition, Fallon was unable to communicate with her study group for support during the unplugging.

The research completed by Hill et al. (2009) investigated adult learners' self-regulated learning (SRL) experience in a graduate online course. Specifically, a qualitative research design was adopted to observe learners' resource use and learners' motivation to learn in an online course. The resources used by the participants were classified into two categories: information resources and human resources. This research can be applied to Fallon as she used social media sites to seek course related information about her CPA exam. The benefits of this research are that it gives readers a look at how students use SRL to excel in an online class which is important since there is limited synchronous interaction. Although my original mention of this article stated that a disadvantage of this research was that all six participants were white females and does not give a varying opinion about SRL. After completing my research, I can say that the results of this study are universal as Fallon used her online resources for the same thing. However, hers was not attached to a class, she went out looking for the group on social media on her own.

Matzat and Vrieling (2015) examined survey responses of secondary education teachers to see if self-regulated learning "naturally aligns" with social media. The findings of the research provided evidence that there is a "natural alliance" between SRL practices and social media use in the classroom. I believe there is also a "natural alliance" in this research. Participants used self-regulated practices to keep them from returning to social media during the two-week unplugging. By doing things as simple as ignoring texts, group notifications and email with links to social media or not engaging with people that you generally talk to online.

Ramani and Diwanji (2022) created a diagram illustrating the reasons behind social media addiction (see Figure 2). According to the research, the reasons for social media addiction are: (1) addictive features; (2) connect to people; (3) fear of missing out; and (4) compare with other's life. These results directly correlate with the findings of my research of (1) habitual use, (2) going down the rabbit hole; (3) fear of missing out, and (4) negative feelings. In the diagram, self-reflection falls under the intervention category as something you can use to help put a stop to addiction but also acts as one of my phases of self-regulation. This research informs the use of social media in an adult learning context by helping us understand that although people use social media to connect with people, constant connectivity with those people does have addictive features and if integrated into higher education, there could definitely be some blow back and negative effects for adults.

What about those not using social media or those who do not want to be connected because of addiction? The results and experiences gained during this study suggest that an app and web version need to be available to access. This way, much like Fallon, if you do not want to be connected or tempted to go online as a distraction you can still access the content through a browser and you are not tempted to fall into a time sink. Fallon was able to connect to social media, but used this well-designed tactic to keep her focused. To employ this small but effective tactic, takes self-control, self-management and ultimately self-regulation. Another recommendation would be to incorporate the limit settings on your phone or download an app like Space or Forest that will help you monitor how long you are on social media. Another option is to put your phone on airplane mode when you need to focus. That way, your texts and notifications do not come in and distract you. Once you are done, you can choose to turn the airplane mode on.

Suggestions for Future Research

The study by Chen and Kuo (2017) lists seven dimensions of social media resistance: usage barriers, values barriers, physical risks, trust risks, security belief barriers, mutual benefit belief barriers, and image barriers, which was validated by a research conducted by Pew Research Center (2017). However, the findings of this study suggested the opposite. In this study, all the participants expressed the benefits of unplugging in their lives but have all returned to social media to the same extent that they were on prior to unplugging, while some state that their usage was the same or even worse than it was before. So, there is something about social media that is highly addictive, and more studies need to be done on the algorithm that controls an individual's timeline. The question also remains as to how often unplugging needs to happen and for how long. According to Oberlo Statistics (2022), the average amount of time spent on social media worldwide is set to hit 147 minutes, or two hours and 27 minutes, a day in 2022. Not only is this a two-minute increase on 2021 numbers, but it is also the highest ever recorded. With the introduction of new social media apps, I don't think that number will decline any time soon. A series of studies is also needed to help determine that for various age groups.

Future studies are also suggested to provide more evidence on how unplugging from social media regularly helps adults to connect better with the people in their immediate family or circle and further suggests measures for the regulation of social media and the apps created. Nowadays, adults are often connected to their phones but disconnected to those around themselves. By participating in a regular unplugging, it will be easier to connect to our loved ones.

Future research should be done in this area with other groups since I was only able to collect data from African American women. It was interesting to see that only one male

expressed interest in participating in this study. It made me to revisit the list I had collected who had announced that they were taking a break from social media or unplugging. There were only a few males on that list as well. Therefore, future research studies could consider purposefully recruiting male participants and how it might differ from female unplugging.

Other researchers can also conduct an unplugging project similar to this one, but with a larger, more diverse population to see if there are similarities within the larger group. Another option is to keep the participants with similar demographics and unplug for a longer amount of time to see if the final results are similar and how participants return to their lives while integrating social media. Alternate studies could be done with a group of friends to see how unplugging helps or hurts their personal relationship with each other.

Another type of future research studies that would benefit the field is to research adult educators and adult learners who are interested in a reprieve from social media. The findings can serve as a guide to help adult educators understand how much social media to integrate into their adult learning classes and help adult learners understand how unplugging from social media may benefit their learning.

Chapter Summary

It is very easy to get caught up in social media; between the constant stimulation it provides and the algorithms that are designed to keep you engaged. It is common to see people, no matter where they are, engaged on their phones and interacting with some form of social media. There are many challenges when it comes to social media both in how we study it and deciding what is the right balance between being plugged in and being unplugged. The best course of action is to unplug on a consistent basis to try to become less dependent on the

satisfaction that likes and interactions give you. Social media can be fun and entertaining or just a way to occupy your time, but there are also risks to constantly connected. My hopes are that my research sparks more studies that look at social media and how it affects adults.

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Appendix A - IRB Approval Letter



TO: Haijun Kang
Educational Leadership
Manhattan, KS 66506

FROM: Rick Scheidt, Chair
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: 04/01/2021

RE: Approval of Proposal Entitled, "To Unplug or Not to Unplug: Learning the Social Media Habits of Adult Learners."

Proposal Number IRB-10646

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects has reviewed your proposal and has granted full approval. This proposal is **approved for three years from the date of this correspondence.**

APPROVAL DATE: 04/01/2021

EXPIRATION DATE: 03/31/2024

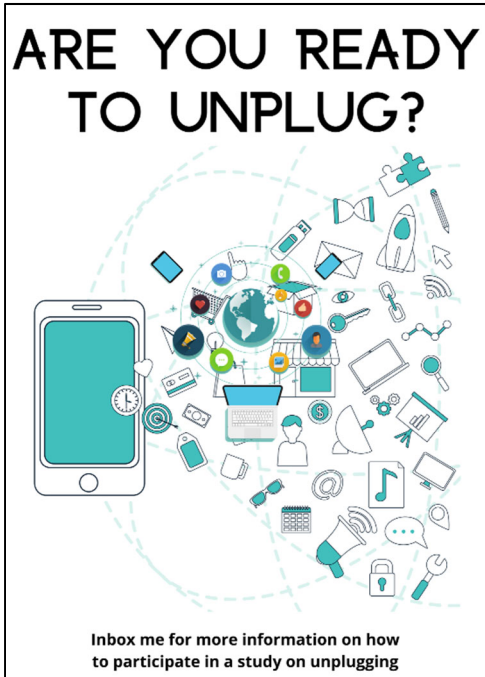
In giving its approval, the Committee has determined that:

No more than minimal risk to subjects

This approval applies only to the proposal currently on file as written. Any change or modification affecting human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation. All approved proposals are subject to continuing review, which may include the examination of records connected with the project. Announced post-approval monitoring may be performed during the course of this approval period by URCO staff. Injuries, unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the IRB and / or the URCO.

Electronically signed by Rick Scheidt on 04/01/2021 11:02 AM ET

Appendix B - Social Media Ads



Appendix C - Consent Letter/Email

(Insert Date)

Dear (Insert Potential Research Participant's Name):

You are being invited to participate in a doctoral dissertation research study entitled,
“To Unplug or Not to Unplug: Learning The Social Media Habits Of Adult Learners”

The purpose of the study is to understand people's experience when they unplug from social media. In particular, we are interested in how you feel when you are unplugged and how you feel when you reengage with social media. This research study has been approved by the Kansas State University Institutional Review Board.

There will be a total of three interviews, each lasting about an hour. During this time, you will be interviewed about your experiences with and without social media. The interviews will be conducted wherever you prefer (e.g. in your home, public place or over Zoom), and will be digitally or tape-recorded. As a part of the study, you will also be asked to write and journal about your experiences; if you prefer you can submit a video diary. There are no anticipated risks or discomforts related to this research.

Several steps will be taken to protect your anonymity and identity. While the interviews will be tape recorded, the recordings will be destroyed once they have been transcribed. The typed interviews will NOT contain any mention of your name, and any identifying information from the interview will be removed. The typed interviews will also be kept on a flash drive that will be locked in a safe at the home of the researcher, who will be the only person to have access to the interviews.

All audio and typed interviews will be destroyed after 5 years' time. Please note that although collected data may be made public or used for future research purposes, your identity will always remain confidential. In addition, information from the interviews may be used for future research purposes without additional consent.

Your participation in this research is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time for any reason. If you do this, the researcher will request an exit interview. It will be at your discretion if you comply.

The results from this study will be presented in a doctoral dissertation and possibly presented at conferences or read by students and educational professionals in journals or conferences. At no time, however, will your name be used or any identifying information revealed. If you wish to receive a copy of the results from this study, you may contact one of the researchers below. If you require any information about this study, or would like to speak to one of the researchers, please call Courtenay Wills at 417-894-5210 of Kansas State University. If you have any other questions regarding this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Haijun Kang, Associate Professor (hjkang@ksu.edu), Rick Scheidt, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects or Cheryl Doerr, Associate Vice President for Research Compliance.

I have read (or have been read) the above information regarding this research study on the experience of unplugging, and consent to participate in this study.

_____ (Printed Name)

_____ (Signature)

_____ (Date)

Appendix D - Screening Questions to be used in Survey

1. How long have you had social media?
2. Do you have a Facebook and a LinkedIn Account?
3. How many accounts do you have?
4. Which app do you currently spend the most time engaging with online?
5. What type of activities do you do on these social networking sites?
6. Do you have frequent contact (at least 2x week) with family or friends on social media (via direct interaction, phone, or computer)?
7. Would you be willing to unplug from social media for two weeks?
8. How do you feel about journaling your thoughts and experiences?
9. Can you be honest about your experiences?

If interviewee agree to participate in this study,

- ✓ Participant will confirm phone and email address
- ✓ Participant needs to sign a consent form
- ✓ Participant will receive three journals & the writing assignments at the first meeting or through the mail.

Appendix E - Guiding Questions for Interviews

Interview One:

Goal: Discussing how the participant experienced unplugging as it relates to the forethought phase of self-regulated learning (RQ1):

1. Can you describe a typical day in your life using social media?
2. Can you tell me about how you felt when you learned that you'd been accepted into the research?
3. When you think about unplugging do you feel like you would miss anything being off of social media?
4. Can you tell me about your thought process or the planning that you will go through when preparing to unplug?

Interview Two:

Goal: Discussing how the participant experienced unplugging as it relates to the performance phase of self-regulated learning (RQ2):

1. Walk me through a typical day in your life while you were unplugged?
 - a. What was the best part of your day? What was the worst part?
2. Tell me what you have learned about your own self-control during the unplugging?
3. Can you describe the self-reflection that you experienced while unplugging?
4. Was your unplugging restful or stressful? Please explain.
5. Think about the friends and family you primarily communicate with through social media. What alternative method did you use to stay in contact with them?
6. Can you tell me what you focused your attention on during this time of unplugging?
7. I know the assignment was only to unplug for two weeks; do you think it should have been longer or shorter? Why or why not?
 - a. Would you unplug again? If yes, how long would you go this time?
8. Would you recommend unplugging to friends and family? Why or why not?

Interview Three:

Goal: Discussing how the participant experienced unplugging as it relates to the self-reflection phase of self-regulated learning (RQ3):

1. Tell me in detail about the self-reflection process you experienced when it was time to return to social media?
2. Can you describe your feelings when you logged back in to social media for the first time?
3. Can you tell me how your actions have changed since you unplugged from social media and returned?
4. Can you describe a typical day in your life now since your return to social media?
5. Can you tell me in detail how satisfied you are with your ability to unplug during this time span?
6. Can you tell me if there was anything that attributed to your success during this time of unplugging?

Appendix F - Journaling Guide & Prompts

Journal #1: Week 1 of Unplugging	
<i>Instructions:</i> Choose a prompt each day to write about your experience	
Prompt 1	Do you miss social media? Why or why not?
Prompt 2	What are some of your survival tactics for unplugging?
Prompt 3	What changes have you seen in your everyday behaviors?
Prompt 4	What challenges have you overcome while being unplugged?
Prompt 5	What are you doing more of now that you are unplugged? Is this positive or negative?
Prompt 6	Think back on different times this week when you thought about social media, where the thoughts positive or negative?
Prompt 7	What life lessons has unplugging taught you?

Journal #2: Week 2 of Unplugging	
<i>Instructions:</i> Choose a prompt each day to write about your experience	
Prompt 1	Have you experienced FOMO (fear of missing out) since you've unplugged?
Prompt 2	What do you have more time for since unplugging?
Prompt 3	Do you find yourself feeling bored? If so, how do you deal with it?
Prompt 4	Has the frequency of communication with your friends and family been altered since unplugging?
Prompt 5	Would you consider deleting your Facebook account? Why or why not?
Prompt 6	Would you consider deleting your LinkedIn account? Why or why not?
Prompt 7	What have you learned about yourself during this unplugging?

Journal #3: After Returning to Social Media	
<i>Instructions:</i> Choose a prompt each day to write about your experience	
Prompt 1	Does social media ever make you feel sad?
Prompt 2	Does your digital life have side effects?
Prompt 3	What do you do to relax?
Prompt 4	What's so great about Facebook? What would you change?
Prompt 5	What role does stress play in your life?
Prompt 6	Are you on your phone more now that you're back on social media? Why or why not?
Prompt 7	Do ever seek advice on the internet?
Prompt 8	How good are you at time management?
Prompt 9	Do you set rules for yourself about how much time you spend on social media? Why or why not?
Prompt 10	What's so great about LinkedIn? What would you change?
Prompt 11	What did you once like about social media that you now hate?
Prompt 12	What did you once hate about social media that you now like?
Prompt 13	Do you wish you had more privacy online?
Prompt 14	Are you distracted by technology?

Questions adapted from (Gonchar, 2016)