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User Experiences of Regret While Engaging with Social Media

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USER EXPERIENCES OF REGRET

WHILE ENGAGING WITH SOCIAL MEDIA

by

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THESIS

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Abstract

Social media offers users the ability to participate with a social network of others in a process of sharing and fellowship, presenting an impression of self and the ability to monitor constructed expressions. Recent studies examining the ritual view of communication, impression management, self-regulation, and self-reflective capabilities show each of these plays a role when using certain social media sites. However, a research gap exists regarding the use of *any* social media and the perspectives of young adult users during the scenario of experiencing regret as the result of engaging with social media.

The study is a mixed-methods exploratory study analyzing emergent themes of this phenomenon. A survey of qualitative open-ended questions and quantitative directed-response choices was administered to 332 individuals. Descriptive, In-Vivo, Emotion and Pattern qualitative coding methods were administered for detailed analysis, as well as SPSS frequency analysis to those reporting the experience of regret ($n = 152$) while using social media. Findings reveal that users engage in a ritual view of communication while using social media that may be influenced positively or negatively by content posted or the frequency of use. Users seek to manage their own personal impressions to others, while also affecting other users' impressions within the mediated network Self-regulation was in force, suspended or altered during the regrettable social media post, yet self-

reflective capabilities assisted user comprehension of regret and post ramifications. Action regrets took place with both hot and cold emotional states. Frequency of social media posting decreased after experiencing instances of regrettable posts.

Keywords: social media, regret, ritual view of communication, impression management, social cognitive theory

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The current study examines the intersection of social media use and resulting experiences of regret. While such stories are often cited in the news, motivation for this study came from a short article by the Associated Press published in the *Albuquerque Journal* titled, "Man Regrets Posting Video of Police Officer's Death" (ABQnews Staff, 2015), in which the camera operator expressed regret about sharing his video footage online. Jordi Mir told the Associated Press that it was a "stupid reflex *based on years of interacting with social media*" (italics added). Mir posted the smartphone video related to the January 7, 2015, Charlie Hebdo massacre in Paris on his Facebook timeline for as little as 15 minutes before thinking maybe he should take it down. Less than an hour after removing the video from his page, Mir was startled to see the 42-second video playing on his television screen. In the short 15 minutes of its presence on Facebook, a friend had uploaded the video to YouTube and it went viral from there. Global news organizations replayed the video, and screenshots of it went viral across print and digital media. According to Wang et al. (2011), "The problem is that sites like Facebook are becoming what [social media scholar danah boyd calls 'networked publics'] — public places on the Internet…." Mir's self-described "reflex," or habit of posting to social media, within the context of rational action caused both emotional and cognitive regret. Sensitive content intersecting with a highly networked media system creates a one-way transmission in so far as the content, once posted, cannot be fully withdrawn.

According to the Pew Research Center's Internet and Life Project, in just the past ten years social media has become a significant part of many people's lives (Duggan,

Ellison et al., 2015; Fox & Rainie, 2014; Lenhart & Page, 2015; Mobile Technology, n.d.; & Perrin, 2015). In the past, communication took place interpersonally or through a mass medium. In contrast, social media is a tool of (potentially) mass two-way communication whereby users send or receive content covering a variety of topics openly. Whether participants use social media to broadcast, snoop, or connect, its relevance in the arena of new media and the way we live our lives is undeniable. Due to the common use of social media, it is important to note the author's positionality with social media when considering the design of the project.

In 2008, I began using social media, starting with Facebook. Experiencing the learning curve of building a Facebook user profile, I considered how much information to include to appear interesting, while deciding what information to *not* include in order to protect privacy. In the same vein, I monitored my children's accounts and taught them what I considered to be appropriate social media etiquette. I also learned how to upload pictures from a digital camera to the computer and then to Facebook and closely watched the number of my Facebook friends grow. I have been engaging with several social media applications on a daily or weekly basis since then. By going through the personal decision-making process concerning what is appropriate to post and teaching my children to do the same, I have experienced the social benefits and challenges of social media. By avoiding over-sharing and sensitive, offensive, or controversial topics, and through being online friends with almost 600 others over the course of eight years, I have encountered numerous "cringe moments" while reading others' posts, all the while thinking, "They are probably going to regret that." It is these personal experiences, countless popular

media news stories, and the discovery of related research that have led me to the development of the current study.

This thesis examines the use of social media and the situations that surround posting content resulting in feelings of regret. Specifically, the research provides insight into how users use social media in ways that lead to regretful experiences and the resulting effects or changes made in rituals associated with social media use. This chapter provides background information about social media and negative consequences of its use. First, the introduction of social media as an instrument for social networking is discussed, along with a brief description of the variety of sites currently in use. Second, data showing current demographics of social media use will be provided. Next, examples of regretful experiences using social network sites as reported in popular media will be described. Finally, the impact of negative social media interactions with unexpected consequences is considered.

The Introduction of Personal Computer Use and Social Media

E. M. Forster's words from his novel *Howard's End* state it simply, "Only connect…." People have a desire to communicate with and be connected with others; hence, there is an entire field of study dedicated to communication. Humans find ways to connect with one another through a variety of means. When face-to-face communication is not possible or necessary, other methods are used. From handwritten letters delivered via the postal service, telegraphic messages transmitted over wires, vocalizations through telephone circuitry, electronic memos within the Internet system, to text messages using mobile phones, people find a method of communication within social networks. Social networks act as an important part of societal fabrics, and frequently communicating with

others benefits overall mental health (Hampton, Goulet, Rainie, & Purcell, 2011). Without the invention of the Internet and World Wide Web, along with wireless and mobile networks, our conceptions of modern communication through instant connectivity would be radically altered.

Through a series of hardware connections and electronic switching processes, information has been transmitted from one computer to another since the 1980s. The availability of this technology to home users came in the early 1990s with sales of personal computers and introduction of the World Wide Web, a method for computers to search for multimedia information hosted by other computers globally (Leiner et al., 2009). (Although the Internet is technically the architecture of machines in this vast system, and the World Wide Web is the coding organization used for information display and searching, for the purposes of this paper the term *Internet* will be used to encompass everything the Internet and World Wide Web do together, even though they technically are different.)

Along with the Internet functioning as a resource for information and electronic commerce, it also became a place to host social network sites (SNSs). These websites:

> …allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. (boyd & Ellison, 2008, p. 210)

Virtual communities start by members creating an account, completing a questionnaire to create a profile, and inviting friends or followers to interconnect via the SNS's website platform. By creating this online identity, a person can "type oneself into being" (Sundén,

2003, p. 3). With the function of creating mediated self-identity or personal narrative and using electronic public media networks, these websites are also often called social media. (For this study, the terms *social network sites* and *social media* are used interchangeably.)

As of this writing, the most commonly used social networking sites include Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Google Plus +, Tumblr, and Instagram (Top 15 Most Popular, 2015). Each of these sites has the ability to share either, or a combination of, text, photos, and video with family, friends, businesses, and the public. Most offer private or public settings that either restrict or open the communications to others in the SNS and the opportunity to directly message another participant. Social media sites, along with the proliferation of Internet use and mobile smartphones, have changed the way users communicate with one another and experience social relationships.

Social Media Use Preview

Although the ability to connect with others instantaneously via the Internet originally required the use of computers, the more recent availability of cellular telephone and wireless Internet service, along with smartphone technology advances, makes connecting with others easier than ever. Social media sites can be reached by the touch of a fingertip within seconds. According to a study published in 2015, 65% of adults in the United States reported using social networking sites, and fully 90% of young adults, ages 18 to 29 years old, use SNS (Perrin, 2015). The majority of young adults report smartphone ownership (83%), making social media use readily accessible (Fox & Raine, 2014). Studies describe Internet use as essential to these young adults and find that many receive support and relationship maintenance from social media networks (Hampton,

Goulet, Rainie & Purcell, 2011). For this reason it is important to further understand user experiences with social media.

Social Media Mistakes

With face-to-face communication, we gain instant verbal and nonverbal responses that provide feedback on the success or failure of each iteration or each interaction. Social media are neither so rich in reactions, nor so seemingly instantaneous. When using computer-mediated communication, without such social cues to aid in message encoding or decoding, irretrievable mistakes of judgment in constructing or posting messages may take place. Social media messages, whether textual or visual, can be seen either by a closed network of chosen people or by the greater public, depending on the member's privacy settings. Public figures, such as celebrities, professional athletes, and business people, are more susceptible to making such mistakes for three reasons: they would likely set their social media accounts for public accessibility, they are expected to interact online with their publics, and they have more to lose. For example, celebrity mom Kris Jenner posted a picture of herself with well-known chef Gordon Ramsey. A problem arose when Ramsey posted their original picture on his Instagram account while Jenner's Instagram photo was extensively edited. Social media users accused Jenner of being a fake with her airbrushed appearance (11 Celebrities, 2015). Greek Olympic triple jumper Paraskevi Papachristou posted a racist tweet about the number of Africans in Greece, commenting that at least the mosquitos of West Nile would eat them first. She was dropped from her national team a few weeks before the 2012 Olympics (Silvers & Yuscavage, 2013). In the field of business, public relations consultant Justine Sacco became both hated and unemployed by tweeting, "Going to Africa. I hope I don't get

AIDS. Just kidding. I'm white!" before boarding a flight to South Africa in 2013. The

hash tag, "#HasJustineLandedYet?" began trending before her flight touched down (Kim,

2015). Each of these examples displays poor choices in social media posts and resulting

negative consequences for the message creators.

Considerations of Social Media Negative Impact

Interaction with social networking sites provides opportunities for positive and

negative consequences. According to the Pew Research Center's Internet Project,

periodic survey data show that Internet use and social media engagement are positive

experiences for the majority of users (Hampton, Goulet, Rainie, & Purcell, 2011).

However, as highlighted above, with the high percentage of smart phone ownership and

SNS use, there are countless opportunities for social media user mistakes, often

unintentional, that produce negative consequences, organizational strife, feelings of

regret, and personal apologies. For this reason, it is important to further understand what

research has been conducted with regard to social media and SNS posts that lead users to

feelings of regret.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter will provide a summary of research relevant to the present study. First, reports of the rising and diverse use of social media are explained. Second, the concept of regret defined for the purposes of this study and application to social media will be explained. Third, the interpersonal theory of impression management will be described and applied to social media use. Next, principles of social cognitive theory self-regulation and self-reflective capabilities will be explored and related to interaction with social media. Finally, the ritual view of communication theory will be explicated and the application to what is considered new media, particularly social media or social network sites, will be offered.

Social Media User and Usage Demographics

According to the Pew Research Center Internet Project Survey, 53% of Internet users indicated that at a minimum, the Internet would be very hard to live without, up from 38% in 2006 (Fox & Rainie, 2014). Categorically, "…a notable share of Americans say the Internet is essential to them" (para. 9). About 39% of online adults state the Internet is essential to their jobs or lifestyle and about 30% report it would be hard to give up because they enjoy being online. With growing technology use and dependence, many users report social media use.

The Pew Research Center began systematically tracking social media usage in 2005. According to the results of surveys of about 65,000 U.S. adults and 47,000 interviews conducted between 2005 and 2015, 65% of adults currently use social networking sites, charting a ten-fold increase in a decade (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Social Networking Use 2005-2015

Social Networking Use Has Shot Up in Past Decade
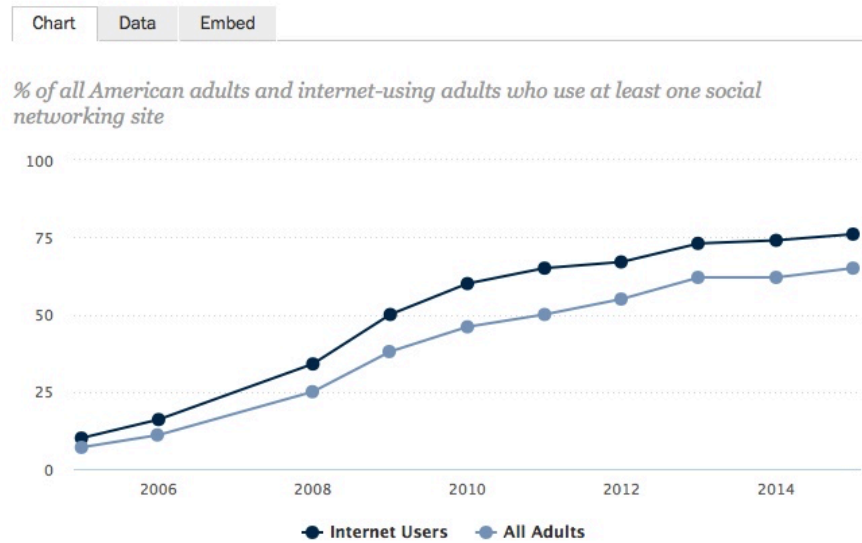
| Chart | Data | Embed |

% of all American adults and internet-using adults who use at least one social networking site

Source: Pew Research Center surveys, 2005-2006, 2008-2015. No data are available for 2007.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

(Perrin, 2015)

Although 35% of senior citizens currently report social media use, compared to 2% in 2005, young adults, aged 18 to 29, by far are the most significant adopters of social media use at 90%, a 78-point increase since 2005 (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Young Adult Social Media Use

Young Adults Still Are the Most Likely to Use Social Media
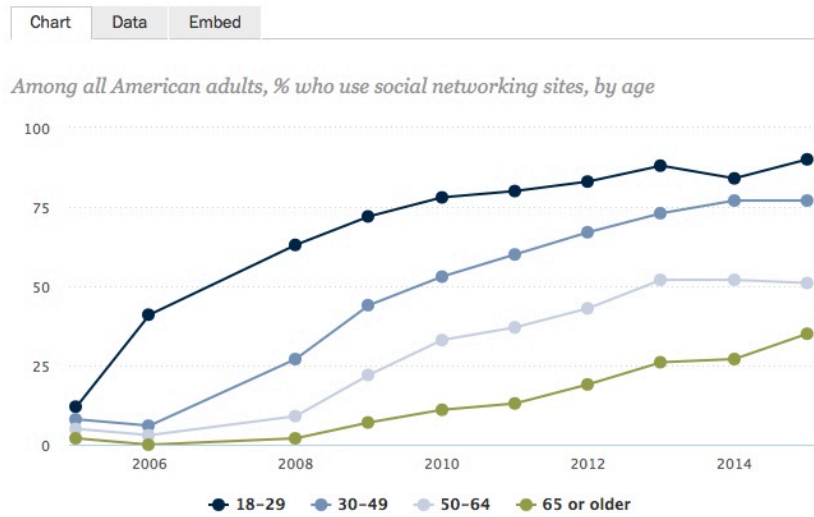
| Chart | Data | Embed |

Among all American adults, % who use social networking sites, by age

Source: Pew Research Center surveys, 2005-2006, 2008-2015. No data are available for 2007.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

(Perrin, 2015)

The difference in gender use is nominal with 68% of women and 62% of men using social media. In this same study, similar usage rates were recorded among racial and ethnicity backgrounds with 65% of whites, 65% of Hispanics and 56% of African-Americans currently using social media. The surveys showed more disparity in terms of educational background and geography, however. Of those with at least some college education 70% report social media use compared to 54% of those with a high school diploma or less. In terms of geographic disparities, only 58% of rural residents compared with 68% suburban and 64% of urban residents engage with social media. Nevertheless, of all adults using the Internet, 76% – over three-fourths – use some form of social media (Perrin, 2015). These figures display an overall high adoption rate of social media engagement among the adult population, indicating a need to understand how SNSs are being used.

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If 76% of Internet-using adults are interacting with SNSs, which ones are they using? According to Pew Research Center's annual Social Media Update Report 2014, 71% of American online adults use Facebook, 28% use LinkedIn, 28% use Pinterest, 26% use Instagram, and 23% use Twitter (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Trends with Social Media Applications
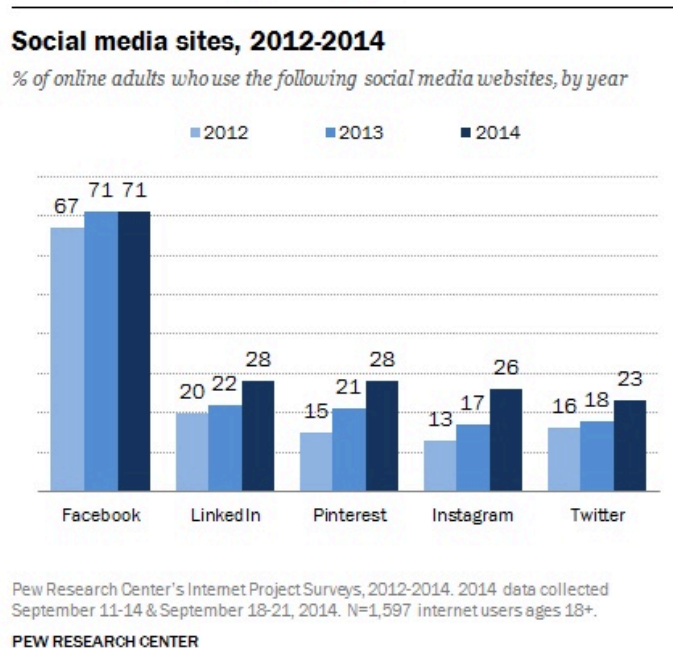
(Duggan, Ellison, Lampe, Lenhart, & Madden, 2015).

The report did not mention Snapchat, Tumblr or YouTube; however, a more recent report cites Snapchat passing Twitter in daily usage (Frier, 2016). Although the number of U.S. adults using Facebook has leveled off, of those interacting with it, 70% do so daily and 45% use it multiple times a day. Since 2013, the number of users of other SNSs, such as LinkedIn, Pinterest, Instagram and Twitter, has continued to grow and multi-site use is on the rise. Of online adults, 52% used multiple SNSs in 2014, an increase of 10 points, or 24%, since 2013. In addition, for the first time, over half (53%) of young adults using the Internet have an account on Instagram. Almost half of

Instagram users (49%) visit the site daily (Duggan, Ellison, et al., 2015). The results of the Social Media Update Report 2014 confirm a steady and growing interaction with SNSs among adults, especially young adults aged 18-29 years.

According to the Pew Research Center's Mobile Technology Fact Sheet (n.d.), 98% of young adults, aged 18-29 years, have a cell phone; 83% use smartphones. With the growing use of cell phones, the most recent data collected in 2012 show 67% of young adult cell phone users engage with social media on a daily basis. Differentiating characteristics of cell phone users frequenting SNSs reflect that, "Young people, blacks, Hispanics, the highly educated and those with a higher annual household income are more likely to use SNS on their phones than other groups" (Social Networking Fact Sheet, n.d., para. 6). Of online young adults within the age group of 18-29 years, 87% use Facebook, 53% use Instagram, 37% use Twitter, 34% use Pinterest, and 23% use LinkedIn (Duggan, Ellison, et al., 2015). Although teens, aged 13-17 years old, were not sampled for the present study, it is important to note that their current use of Internet and cell phones is as prevalent as it is among their older counterparts, as they will be the future group of young adult users.

Teen Social Media Use

According to Teens, Social Media and Technology Overview 2015, 91% of teens surveyed go online regularly from a mobile device, as opposed to a computer or tablet. Nearly all African-American and at least 90% of Anglo and Hispanic/Latino teens reported the same. The study states 73% of teens own smartphones with Internet capabilities. Among the teens questioned, 24% reported "almost constantly" using the Internet and another 56% reported using the Internet several times a day via their phones.

Researchers found that 76% of teens indicated using social media. Of those, 89% reported using at least one of the common SNSs. Facebook was the most popular site with 71% usage and boys and girls were represented equally with the typical teen having 145 Facebook friends. Instagram was the second most popular SNS among teens with 52% reporting usage, and girls use Instagram (61%) more than boys (44%) (Lenhart & Page, 2015). In summary, these demographics show that older adults, young adults and teens increasingly use the Internet, smart phone technology, and SNSs to connect in some way with others.

Social Media – Connecting with Others

When asked whether online communications have generally made them socially richer, 67% of Internet users answered positively that online communication has strengthened relationships with family and friends, while 18% say it generally weakens close relationships. The study also indicated that there were no significant demographic differences in terms of gender, age, income, education or length of time using the Internet. In general, researchers of the study concluded that participants think the "Internet has been a plus for society and an especially good thing for individual users" (Fox & Rainie, 2014).

Social impact. People engage with social media by connecting to a virtual community. Researchers found that the use of SNSs creates measurable social impact. In a study examining the social impact of SNSs, Internet users get "more support from their social ties," SNSs are "increasingly used to keep up with close social ties," the average user has more *close* social ties, and is "half as likely to be socially isolated as the average American" (Hampton, Goulet, Rainie, & Purcell, 2011). In 2014 Facebook accounts were

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held by 71% of adult online users. The Hampton et al. study indicates Facebook users are more trusting than others, have more close relationships, get the most support from their Internet social ties, are more politically engaged than most others, and that Facebook revives "dormant" relationships (2011). In these ways, connecting with others through the Internet seems to be a positive experience.

Support. In terms of measuring online community support, Pew's Internet Project Survey reports that 70% of Internet users have been treated kindly online, while 25% state they were treated unkindly. More than half (56%) have seen an Internet community come together to offer support or assistance and 25% have left an online group due to negative encounters. Young adults report both positive and negative social experiences. Of all the adult age groups in the study, young adult users aged 18-29 years have encountered the most incidents of being treated kindly *and* unkindly by others, as well as having seen online group help *and* online group unpleasantness.

Not only are SNSs used for positive social interactions, but also by parents and others seeking advice. To find support for raising children, research shows mothers and fathers report using SNSs to respond to good news, get useful information, receive support, respond to questions, and respond to bad news (Duggan, Lennart, Lampe, & Ellison, 2015). The same survey reported that 94% of Facebook-using parents share, post, or comment on the site. Whereas parents use SNSs to join a virtual community and receive support with their daily challenges, university students also use social media as a way to build or maintain relationships.

Relationship maintenance. Several studies of university-aged students found that SNSs are used to maintain relationships with friends and family, as well as generate

new friendships. One study found that 95.5% of students aged 18 to 19 years old use Facebook either daily or multiple times each day to remain connected with friends and family (Ophus & Abbitt, 2009). Another study indicated that 85% of students used Facebook to communicate with friends not on campus and spent time reading their friends' news feeds (Pempek, Yermolayava, & Calvert, 2009). Another review confirmed that the reason students use Facebook is to maintain contact with current friends and family members (Hew, 2011). Although building or maintaining relationships through the Internet appears to have a positive social impact overall, there are some negative impacts as well.

Negative experiences. Mass communication is a process in which the sender conveys information through a channel to a large, typically homogeneous audience (Pearce, 2009). Newer media, such as social media, by contrast, can be understood as exemplifying a two-way interactive ritual communication system of sharing, participation, and fellowship. This updated form of sending and receiving information can result in negative experiences as well. One team of academics found that both male and female adults that have and use a Facebook profile, report lower body satisfaction (Stronge, Greaves, Milojev, West-Newman, Barlow, & Sibley, 2015). This finding was true for participants of all ages. Instances of cyberbullying are not uncommon and lead to higher reports of suicidal thoughts and attempts compared to those who had not experienced cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). Internet use has also been linked with higher measures of depression and loneliness (Kim, LeRose, & Peng, 2009).

Review of the literature thus far shows that the bulk of social media studies performed focus on Facebook as the common platform. Several academic studies have

examined only Facebook usage since it is the most prevalent SNS and many users report positive outcomes. However, other SNSs are growing in popularity and beg to be examined. Since other SNSs are gaining in popularity it is important to understand user experiences with them as well. In addition, not all social media interactions are favorable; users report both positive and negative experiences.

Regret Defined

Empirical psychological, psychoanalytic, and/or sociological studies surrounding the concept of regret are surprisingly scant, based upon a keyword search. This appears to be because, although it is a simple word, *regret* is a somewhat complex notion. Landman's lexiconic analysis defines regret in both cognitive and emotional terms (1987). Emotional regret corresponds with feelings of sadness or despair as a result of something that has taken place. Cognitive regret correlates with a decisive action resulting in the recognition of misgivings or a mistake. According to Google books Ngram Viewer, since 1800 the use of the word regret in books is at an all-time low: just 31% of its calculated high use in 1834 (Regret, n.d.). Regret in the emotional sense includes topics such as depression, guilt, and shame, that have received far more attention in recent years. Taking a cognitive approach, a traditional Aristotelian view of rationality and reason supports feelings of misgivings after actions produce an unintended outcome.

Some experiences of regret contain both an emotional and a cognitive component. According to Landman, "Modern decision theorists have begun to recognize the importance of regret in decision making; regret theories assert that choice depends not only on the probability and the value of the chosen outcome but also on the amount of regret for alternatives not chosen" (1987, p. 135).

Empirical studies conducted by Gilovich, Medvec and Kahneman (1994, 1998) found three main categories of regret: (1) action regrets creating a hot state of emotions, described as immediate and intense; (2) inaction wistful regrets, described as long-term and nostalgic, but not necessarily painful; and (3) inaction despair regrets, described as sadness, emptiness, or despair and painful longing as a recognition of inaction. Wang et al. (2011) performed a qualitative study of regrets relating to Facebook use. Their study found that social media regrets almost always stemmed from action regrets, rather than inaction regrets. Furthermore, the Wang et al. study focused on the idea of privacy surrounding Facebook posts and whether the user considered who might see the content. The authors stated that a variety of publics are often present in a user's social network, such as family, friends, and co-workers, "…where different conflicting contexts and social norms coexist" (2011, p. 9). The study also determined that the nature of online and offline regret differs. For example, what we regret in real life tends to be inaction ("I should have told him how I felt") whereas online, in this case on Facebook, regret tends to result from actions where "the impulsiveness of sharing or posting … may blind users to the negative outcomes of posts even if the outcome is immediate" (2011, p. 10).

Relating this notion to social media use, user-generated content may be posted to express emotions or cognitive thoughts. Gilovich, Medvec, and Kahneman (1994, 1998) claim action regrets take place as a result of committing an act. Meanwhile, Wang et al. (2011) affirm that most social media regrets are based on acts, all the while also suggesting that impulsiveness contributes to regret as well.

Other scholars assert that conscious reflections on prior thoughtless activity can be a reason for regret (Stern, 2015; Wang, Norcie, Komanduri, Acquisti, Leon, & Cranor,

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2011; Xie & Kang, 2015). The combination of the cognitively regretful event works in tandem with the emotions of regret along with the ramifications of the occurrence. Therefore, Landman's idea that "mutual roles of reason and sentiment in human thought and action are particularly evident in the phenomenon of regret" (1987, p. 136) is central to the present study.

Social Media and Regret

A recurring news story in popular media deals with the misuse of social media, leading to regret. One informal study reports that 29% of young adults have posted something that may compromise their current job and 74% of young adults have removed something to avoid negative employment-related consequences (Ramachandran, 2013). Some outcomes of regret are job related, such as the one discussed in the introduction of the present study describing Justine Sacco's tweet about AIDS (Ronson, 2015). Others include Congressional representative communications director Elizabeth Lauten's Facebook post criticizing President Obama's daughters (DelReal & O'Keefe, 2014) and a customer service representative for DTE Energy in Detroit's Facebook post of an expletive-filled rant about her job (Vozza, n.d.). All three posters were fired from their jobs.

J. Crew's vice president of men's merchandising, Alejandro Rhett, posted images of himself partying, complete with hash tags making fun of people being laid off (Serota, 2015). Although Rhett was not fired, the photos were removed from his Instagram account, but still can be found circling the Internet, harming the reputation of those involved.

Politicians also appear in the news for regrettable social media posts. One such example occurred twice in as many years. Congressional representative Anthony Weiner of New York reluctantly admitted accidentally posting sexually explicit texts and images to Twitter in 2011. The revelation resulted in Weiner's disgrace and eventual resignation from public office. Announced shamefully at a press conference, Weiner apologized for the "personal mistakes I have made and the embarrassment I have caused" (Pilkington, 2011). The following year, while running in New York City's mayoral race, information about Weiner making similar posts while using Facebook and Formspring surfaced (McCarthy, 2013). The second incident of regrettable social media posts resulted in Weiner dropping out of the campaign. One reporter described "Weinergate" and his career as a "…fall from grace, spectacular and close to complete" (Pilkington, 2011).

All of these examples reinforce the fact that no one can control the spread of content once it is posted online, and that may lead a social media user to regret content the user created, or even re-posted.

Impression Management Theory

Erving Goffman (1959) is credited with the interpersonal theory of impression management, the dramaturgical presentation of self-identity in terms of everyday life performances. Goffman described performance as being goal-oriented based on the social situation and dependent on what impression the actor wanted to give the audience and what interaction the audience expected. Goffman's idea was proposed as a play metaphor, but applied to interpersonal face-to-face communication taking place through symbolic interaction—a socially constructed system of meaning.

In Goffman's impression management model, communication is given vocally and expressively through face-to-face encounters. Both of these communication channels create a representative, possibly deceitful image. For example, in order to present an image of beauty, an actor might use makeup, false eyelashes, and hair treatments to create a favorable visual representation to the actor's public circle. Vocally, intonation and other auditory cues add to an actor's message in order to convey meaning.

Goffman (1959) further describes the action of *modus vivendi*, where participants act in a manner that is expected to be socially acceptable and foster real agreement, as they mutually accept the definition of the situation. One is expected to hold back communication where it would cause disagreement or open conflict; this is called a working consensus and changes with given settings. When one or more actors fail to follow the expected rules of engagement, disruptive events occur: Goffman describes such situations as "confused," "embarrassed," and "untenable," whereby:

> … the individual whose presentation has been discredited may feel ashamed while others present may feel hostile, and all the participants may come to feel ill at ease, nonplussed, out of countenance, embarrassed, experiencing the kind of anomy that is generated when the minute social system of face-to-face interaction breaks down (p. 143).

This vivid description by Goffman is consistent with the more notable public social media gaffes highlighted previously and deserves further consideration with everyday users' SNS experiences.

Social Media and Self Identity

Social media communication can be examined through the lens of impression management. Within SNSs, it is assumed that the actors are either informed about one another before information exchanges, or seek to learn about one another. Recent reports from the Pew Research Center support the idea of impression management within mediated networks, by describing social media users as interacting mainly with family and friends (Social Networking, n.d.).

Researchers argue that social media users generate content relating to their online self-identity (Stern, 2015; Wang et al., 2011). Goffman's idea of personal visual representation can be accomplished on SNSs with a photo or video image. Vocal impressions may be exhibited through videos as well. Textual representations of identity expression also play a role with social media use.

For social media users who communicate in a civilly discursive way, Goffman's idea of a working consensus would be satisfied. Even though social media users are not face-to-face as in Goffman's scenario of *modus vivendi*, participants can experience and exhibit similar expectations of socially acceptable interactions and "disruptive events" caused by the failure to follow expected assumptions relating to online communication behavior (Orphus & Abbitt, 2009; Stern, 2015;Wang et al., 2011). For these reasons, Goffman's presentation of self and impression management will inform the inquiry into users' analysis of recollections of regret while using social media.

Social Cognitive Theory

Like Goffman's impression management theory, Bandura's social cognitive theory (SCT) also explains an individual's performance in social interactions. Founded in

an agentic perspective, SCT explains social interactions using a triadic reciprocal

causation model between personal determinants (cognitive, emotional, and

physiological), behavioral determinants, and environmental determinants (Bandura,

2002). In a social setting, people use personal agency in the production of messages and

are also impacted by the social structure of the transactions. Therefore, "personal agency

and social structure operate as co-determinants in an integrated causal structure rather

than as a disembodied duality" (Bandura, 2002, p. 266). In other words, individuals do

not learn just by self-direction, but also by observation of modeling performed by others.

Modeling can also produce vicarious motivational effects. Vicarious motivators

come from rewarding and punishing outcome expectations in modeled courses of action.

Alternatively, vicarious incentives relate internal experiences to extrinsic outcomes,

dictating whether the individual views either a reward or a punishment as desirable.

Likewise, behavioral decisions will be made based on those reference points. Bandura's

SCT discusses abstract modeling where "rule-governed judgments and actions differ in

specific content and other details while embodying the same underlying rule" (Bandura,

2002, p. 275).

When behavior becomes transgressive, Bandura claims, it is addressed by social

sanctions and internalized self-sanctions. Social sanctions bring social censure and other

negative consequences. Internalized self-sanctions are largely self-controlled and act to

quell transgressions to prevent feelings of self-reproach (Bandura, 2002). Bandura

describes one human processing capability as self-regulation. He states that self-

regulation of motivation and action "involves a dual control process of disequilibrating

discrepancy production (proactive control) followed by equilibrating discrepancy reduction (reactive control)" (2002, p. 268).

Another human processing competence required is self-reflective capability. Bandura writes that the "capability to reflect upon oneself and the adequacy of one's thoughts and actions is another distinctly human attribute that figures prominently in social cognitive theory. People are not only agents of action but self-examiners of their functioning" (Bandura, 2009, p. 269).

Social Media, Self-regulation, and Self-reflective Capabilities

Bandura's social cognitive theory applies to social media communication. Social interaction via cognitive and emotional personal determinants aligns with Landman's idea of the mutual cognitive and emotional roles in regret. Bandura's assertion of personal agency in behavioral choices is similar to Goffman's description of actors' choices of impression management. The idea of a working consensus offered by Goffman also coincides with Bandura's assertion that self sanctions and social sanctions work together to create incentives for behavioral outcomes. For example, an individual using social media may consider others' approval before posting a message, and self-censor prior to posting in order to prevent a misunderstanding and the need to mend a potential transgression after the post.

Further, the concepts of self-regulation and self-reflective capabilities are also seen in social media use. Applied to social media interactions, an individual who normally speaks politely face-to-face to others will self-regulate, or be expected by networked others to "speak" politely in that context as well. Although SCT often refers to observational settings, within the context of social mediated networks, self-direction and

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modeling take place without typical face-to-face social cues. According to LaRose and Eastin, "within SCT habit is a failure of the self-monitoring sub-function of self-regulation. Through repetition we become inattentive to the reasoning behind our media behavior, our mind no longer devotes attention resources to evaluating it, freeing itself for more important decisions" (2004, p. 363). In this way, habit takes over personal behaviors when self-regulation tendencies decrease.

Ritual View of Communication Theory

The way users interact with media has changed over time. James W. Carey is credited with developing the ritual view of communication theory. Originally published in 1989, Carey explicated his analysis in *A Cultural Approach to Communication* by proposing a distinction between transmission communication and ritual communication (1989/2009). Transmission communication, the traditional model, describes a sender/receiver flow of information. Where the message creator imparts, sends, or transmits content to a recipient, a sense of geography and time may be transported depending on the nature of the medium. For example, an account of stock market transactions in China taking place today might be reported in a London newspaper tomorrow; thus communication is understood as content being sent through time and space.

Because the transmission model of communication focuses on communication content that is created and/or disseminated by mass media enterprises, it is also associated with elements of control. Those in possession of information, such as media conglomerates and gatekeepers, including newspaper editors, have the ability to use their power to control where, when, and how information is disseminated. The ritual model of

communication, on the other hand, takes into account a receiver's participation in the process. Rather than communication as a product (content) that is produced, sent, and received, the ritual model describes idea sharing within a community, most likely pre-selected.

Although transmission communication is often hailed as the more traditional model, Carey asserted that the ritual view of communication is actually more ancient in practice and embodies the nature of the root word, commune. He defined ritual communication as being "linked to terms such as 'sharing,' 'participation,' 'association,' 'fellowship,' and 'the possession of a common faith'" (Carey, 1989/2009, p. 5). Carey further characterized the transmission view as the extension of messages across geography for the purpose of control and the ritual view as a means to draw people together with commonality for fellowship.

Carey credited our only recently emerging sense of American culture with the interest in community rather than patterns set by our colonial founders that valued work and practicality. The American appreciation of individuality lends itself to a transmission conception of sender/receiver and control of message rather than a community-based ritual model of communication. Carey often compared models of communication to the fields of religion and science. In religion, the transmission model of communication can be seen in the delivery of messages by someone like the Pope or a preacher to a mass of people in a church, in person or via broadcasting. Scientists also broadcast material about NASA, war, or cloning via traditional news channels or the Internet, and, in doing so, attempt to control the narrative.

With the advent of the telegraph and other technologies that provided aid in disseminating information, time and space were transcended. The primary function of message transmission was to communicate a moral imperative or enlighten the masses. In this way, procedures in religion and news dissemination follow a predictable routine; these examples of the transmission model of communication lend themselves to control of information either by the message creator or the gatekeepers of the means of dissemination. The ritual model of communication, however, differs in form and function.

Carey's ritual view of communication theory considered the maintenance of society and representation of shared beliefs within community (Carey, 1989/2009). Applied to religion, prayer, chanting, and ceremony are viewed as ways of drawing people together. Rather than human thought being individualistic, it is viewed as "predominantly public and social" (Carey, 1989/2009, p. 12). The primary purpose of communication in this context is "to provide not information but confirmation, not to alter attitudes or change minds but to represent an underlying order of things, not to perform functions but to manifest an ongoing and fragile social process" (Carey, 1989/2009, p. 5).

Carey critiqued the transmission communication model involving the conveyance of news. He viewed the newspaper as "an instrument for disseminating news and knowledge" (1989/2009, p. 6) and he questioned how this process affected audiences' attitudes, beliefs, and values. By contrast, Carey argued that ritual view of communication would explain reading the newspaper in this way:

. . . less as sending or gaining information and more as attending a mass, a situation in which nothing new is learned but in which a particular view of the world is portrayed and confirmed. News reading, and writing, is a ritual act and moreover a dramatic one. (Carey, 1989/2009, p. 6).

Considering how one interacts with daily news, whether it is walking to the end of the driveway each morning to pick up the newspaper or turning on the television each evening to watch the nightly news, Carey asserted that people engage in a routine as part of the ritual of communication. A routine may be self-constructed and a simple habit performed alone. However, by participating in a ritual, people interact with a social construction of events that shape society and culture, as Carey explained:

Under a ritual view, then, news is not information but drama. It does not describe the world but portrays an arena of dramatic forces and action; it exists solely in historical time; and it invites our participation on the basis of our assuming, often vicariously, social roles within it. (Carey, 1989/2009, p. 7)

Social Media and the Ritual View of Communication

At the time when Carey first wrote about the models of communication, newspapers, radio, and television were the central means of conveying news and connecting community members through sharing information; social media via the Internet had not yet become a popular form of communication. From Carey's historical point of view, when messaging is shared for the sake of religion, we see dissemination of information along with the gathering of community, ceremony and symbolic interaction. Progressively, Carey's ritual view of communication has evolved when applied to social network sites, only possible with new media technology.

New media technology is an integral advancement to providing a means for media users to create, transmit, and share information and ideas using a ritual view of communication. This ability bypasses legacy media, which uses a transmission model of communication from the few to the masses. However, according to scholar Henry Jenkins, media producers and consumers are no longer considered as always separated. Rather, they are "participants who interact with each other according to a new set of rules that none of us fully understands" (2006, p. 3). Advances in the Internet afforded the ability for users to become content producers.

In the evolution of mediated communication, the Internet was merged with World Wide Web functionality; in a natural progression Web 2.0 technology took over. As CBS News reported, "Web 2.0 represents an important shift in the way digital information is created, shared, stored, distributed, and manipulated" using "protocols and tools … highly social, encouraging users to manipulate and interact with content in new ways" (Wolcott, 2007). Via user-friendly computer programing, Web 2.0 ushered in the era of user-generated content through with web page creation or by using software applications that offer user-centric functions, such as social media. In social media forms of transmission and ritual communication, which is messaging created, transmitted, and networked for the sake of social connection, we see sharing of traditional news generated content (via trending news topics) along with user-generated content within virtual communities, using the tools afforded by new media technology.

The transmission model and ritual communication theory converge with the use of social media, depending on the individual message communicator's intentions. Villi (2012) investigated the ritual view of communication through the sharing of digital

photos, drawing someone into a visual experience of telepresence. Anderson (2011) found that YouTube videos, content creators, and consumers build a participative community using the ritual model. This process may depend upon the routines a user engages in while interacting with social media.

Social network sites combine a user's ability to control and transmit information within a community, whether that community is defined as the greater public or invited guests. Carey's idea of communication acts influencing and connecting a group of people fits within the function of social network sites. Under the influence of John Dewey (a notable education pioneer), Carey claims:

Communication is "the most wonderful" because it is the basis of human fellowship; it produces the social bonds, bogus or not, that tie men together and make associated life possible. Society is possible because of the binding forces of shared information circulating in an organic system. (Carey, 1989/2009, p. 7)

By combining the ideas of transmission and ritual communication, Carey brings to the foreground a consideration of how modern forms of communication interaction might work together, as seen in social network sites. Understanding what happens to social media users who communicate within their social networks without the aid of in-person social cues, the miscues of self-regulation and resulting effects, the self-reflection ensuing from the entire process, and the rituals within this context begs further consideration.

Research Questions

To gain an understanding of how the concept of regret from user experiences while engaging with social media relates to impression management, self-regulation, self-

reflective capabilities, and the ritual view of communication, the following research

questions are proposed:

RQ1: What are the topics of content that social media users regret posting?

RQ2: How do social media users realize regret resulting from posts?

RQ3: For what reasons do social media users post regrettable content?

RQ4: What consequences stem from regrettable social media posts?

RQ5: Why do social media users regret posts?

RQ6: Is there a relationship in the frequency of social media use before and after

experiencing regret?

Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter will provide further insight into the methodology that was used to examine regretful social media experiences. First, the rationale for design method will be explicated. Second, a brief overview of the study will be previewed. Third, a pilot study developed to inform the present study will be described. Next, information regarding the survey design and procedures will be explained. Lastly, data analysis will be addressed.

Method Rationale

This project used a mixed methods approach. The strongest rationale for using a mixed methods approach to research was based on pragmatism. Tashakkori and Teddlie affirm that quantitative and qualitative methods are compatible within a research project (2008), while Datta (1994) reasons that both qualitative and quantitative methodologies should coexist within a given study. Approaching research methods from different methodological perspectives provides for more comprehensive data collection and analysis. The current study is intended to understand descriptions of experiences as well as measure certain ways of using social media. Therefore, qualitative and quantitative methods of acquiring and analyzing data were warranted.

The search for completeness of data can be assisted with a triangulation approach to method design, data analysis, interpretation, and evaluation. According to Clark and Creswell, "methodological triangulation involves the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods and data to study the same phenomena within the same study" (2008, p. 21). Therefore, the present project used a parallel/simultaneous approach to conduct the qualitative and quantitative phase at the same time, with the qualitative

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paradigm taking priority. Wang et al. (2011) similarly used mixed methods while studying regret among Facebook users. Consequently, the current study survey included open-ended inquiries, as well as closed-ended questions with nominal, ordinal, and interval responses for data collection, analysis, interpretation, and evaluation.

Both qualitative and quantitative methods have advantages in their own right. Qualitative research involves interpretivism whereby scholars try to understand social experiences from the actors' point of view. Allowing the social actors to explain their experiences helps researchers to produce credible knowledge claims based on the researcher's interpretations of the participants' narratives (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Actors' realities can be unique or shared, especially in the context of an online social network.

The survey employed for the present study contained a variety of open-ended inquiries into a personal scenario of social media regret. Allowing participants to describe the occurrence in their own ways gave latitude for recollection without prescribing or suggesting inaccurate alternatives. Each respondent self-reported details about social media use and a regretful experience in the respondent's own descriptive style. Since research questions requested the topic of a social media post, the circumstance of regret realization, the reason for posting, the consequence of posting, and reason for regret, open-ended questions allowed self-constructed participant responses.

According to Lindlof and Taylor, the emerging field of media and technology studies poses questions about how "humans utilize technology as communication media to symbolically perform their identities, relationships, and communities," how they adapt existing meanings and strategies to a new medium, and how these practices navigate

constraints within the process (2011, p. 24). Using qualitative techniques for assessing and understanding new media user experiences provided a rich interpretation and understanding of the emergent themes related to social media and regret in order to answer research questions one through five, whereas quantitative measures added to the understanding of frequency and intensity of such instances for research question six.

Quantitative research methods provide a systematic way of observing and evaluating responses or phenomena using statistical or mathematical measurements (Given, 2008). With this paradigm, knowledge of the prevalence of social phenomena can be discovered based on quantifying data or responses from a sample population and generalizing the findings to a larger population. However, because the current sample population was not randomized, results are applicable only to the sample population of the present study. Quantitative data derived from survey questions helped to analyze the trend regarding frequency of social media posting.

It is also important to note that the data collected using the survey in Appendix B will likely be analyzed in future research studies. Therefore only a select amount of the data was analyzed in the current project, as explained further in this chapter. Overall, understanding the information obtained from such measures furthers the general goal of making sense of observable data.

Procedures Overview

Therefore, to gain an understanding of the content of social media posts and participants' perceptions, feelings, and experiences associated with the resulting realization of regret, a mixed methods study design was used. A target population of young adults completed a survey consisting of both quantitative and qualitative questions.

Inductive responses to the questions were transcribed into Microsoft Word for examination. Qualitative data were coded and analyzed, looking for recognizable patterns. Descriptive, In-Vivo, Emotion, and Pattern coding methods (explained below), along with the researcher's social media experiences were used to analyze and interpret the data. Quantifiable data were coded and analyzed using IBM SPSS version 23 software. These procedures contributed to answering the study's research questions. Results (Chapter 4) and findings (Chapter 5) are reported based on these methods of analysis.

Research Questions

As described in Chapter 2, the present study addressed the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the topics of content that social media users regret posting?

Responses to survey question 38 (See Appendix B) provided data for RQ1.

RQ2: How do social media users realize regret resulting from posts?

Responses to survey question 44 provided data for RQ2.

RQ3: For what reasons do social media users post regrettable content?

Responses to survey question 46 provided data for RQ3.

RQ4: What consequences stem from regrettable social media posts?

Responses to survey question 47 provided data for RQ4.

RQ5: Why do social media users regret posts?

Responses to survey question 55 provided data for RQ5.

RQ6: Is there a relationship in the frequency of social media use before and after experiencing regret?

Responses to survey questions 26, 36, and 58 provided data for RQ6.

Responses to other survey questions will be used in a future study.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted to test the effectiveness of the initial survey. A convenience sample of undergraduate college students was recruited from two communication department course classrooms at a large Southwestern university. Although Lindlof and Taylor (2011) describe a convenience sample as seeking those who are easily available, in the case of this study, young adults are also perhaps the most important potential target population.

For the pilot study, students were offered 10 class bonus points to complete the survey, and the course instructor offered an alternative optional bonus point assignment for those who did not want to participate in the study. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. After introducing the consent procedures and study to both classes, the measures were distributed with a removable consent letter on the front cover. Students took the surveys home and returned them to class the following week. Participants signed the consent form and gave it to the course instructor to track those earning bonus points. Students placed the surveys in a large envelope, keeping identifying information (the consent forms) separate from the responses. The course instructor returned the envelope of surveys to the researcher.

In addition to demographic questions, the survey asked about the following: types of social media sites being used, motivations for site use, frequency and routines of site use, open-ended experience questions, potential causes of regretful posts, and consequences of regretful posts. Some categorical questions asked for social media usage

frequency responses. These questions were used to prime individuals into thinking about their social media use. Participants were then asked to respond to qualitative open-ended questions, adapted from Wang et al. (2011) to address the research questions for the study.

Since this was a pilot study, categorical responses were used to glean supporting information. Open-ended questions were coded and evaluated for themes and patterns. The researcher relied on an interpretive framework to understand the emergent social media regretful post topics, reasons for regret, consequences of regrettable postings, and possible effects on social media use routines. Based on the responses to the pilot study survey, changes were made to the questionnaire used in the present study.

Quantitative questions that asked about frequency of posts did not have well defined choices. For example, options such as "rarely" and "occasionally" were determined to be too vague and ultimately meaningless in information gathering. The options were changed to more specific time frames, such as "multiple times a day" and "a few times per week." Also, in the pilot study there was not an option for completing the survey if someone had not had a regretful experience using social media. Therefore, a skip logic option was added to the present study survey for participants to skip unnecessary questions and move more quickly and less redundantly through the instrument. The open-ended questions were deemed to be well worded based on the thoroughness of the responses and applicability to the questions asked. The final version of the survey is in Appendix B.

Current Study

  Sample. As noted earlier, according to social media use studies directed by the Pew Research Center, young adults ages 18-29 are the most prevalent social media users (Perrin, 2015). Because of this, I recruited a convenience sample of college students from a large Southwestern university to participate in the study. Although a convenience sample is considered to be those who are easily available (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011), the target population of university students, the majority of which are young adults, was merited in order to capture participants within the 18-29 years age range.

  Data Collection. Once approval for the study was received from the university's Institutional Review Board (Appendix A), I contacted thirteen communication course instructors via email to arrange for classroom access to introduce the current study in a similar manner to that used for the pilot study. Communication courses selected for the research sample were open to all university students, giving the potential for a diverse student population. All instructors said yes, encompassing 17 classes. Once in the classroom, I introduced the project using the approved recruitment script (Appendix C), I distributed a controlled number of paper surveys in each class, enabling accurate counts of the number of surveys distributed and returned.

  Following the protocol outlined in the IRB application, I also explained that participation was voluntary and extra credit points were not offered; however, some instructors opted to give extra credit on their own. The surveys were left with the students until the next class session. I returned to the following class meeting to collect the surveys and provide a courtesy extra credit sign-in form to be left with the instructors. Of 448 surveys distributed, 335 were returned as completed.

Data Cleaning and Entry. Upon examination of those returned, three of the surveys were removed from the study. Two were radically incomplete, and a respondent who was under 18 years of age, which was not permitted by the IRB protocol, completed the third survey. This resulted in 332 usable surveys, an in-tab response rate of 74%.

Instruments and Measures. Although not all of the data collected from the survey administration were used for the current study, the entire survey instrument and measures are explained here. The design of the survey instrument (Appendix B) was influenced by five main sources. First, as explained earlier in this chapter, a mixed method of data collection, analysis, interpretation and evaluation was employed. The beginning section of the survey is composed of standard demographic questions. Second, some questions about social media usage from English's (2013) survey of Irish young adults' use of social media were integrated. Third, some of Wang et al.'s (2011) survey questions about Facebook social media use and regretful incidents regarding privacy perceptions were incorporated. Fourth, a Social Media Affinity Scale developed by Gerlich, Browning, and Westermann (2010) was directly included in the survey. The 13-item scale was developed to determine college students' Internet and social media usage. The original scale developers noted strong internal validity was affirmed with an alpha score of 0.77. External validity of the scale has not yet been confirmed. Exploratory factor analysis was originally performed, indicating factors of Redeeming Value, Shared Interests, and Business and Organization Uses, whereas confirmatory factor analysis was suggested.

Lastly, O'Connor's Decision Regret Scale was directly integrated into the survey (Brehaut, O'Connor, Wood, Hack, Siminoff, Gordon, Feldman-Stewart, 2003). Although the scale was originally developed for medical decision scenarios, it was designed and tested to be a generalizable scale, resulting in five questions about regret and decision measured on a five-point Likert scale. Internal and external scale validity is still warranted. Quantitative data collected from the Social Media Affinity Scale and the Decision Regret Scale, from usage measures and some of the qualitative survey data will likely be used in future studies. In summary, these five influencers, along with the researcher's personal experience using social media, were combined to design an exploratory survey to investigate social media users' experiences, particularly those resulting in regret.

The survey instrument used in the study is composed of questions with open and directed opportunities for response. Questionnaire respondents first answered standard demographic questions. Second, directed-choice questions were asked regarding the participants' past and current social media usage (for example, "Which social media platforms do you have an account with?", "Which social media platform do you use the most?", "How often do you post text, photos, etc.?", and "Why do you use social media?", with categorical options). The next section asked open-ended questions about a scenario where the respondent experienced regret using social media. Sample questions include: "What was the post about?", "How did you feel when you wrote the post?", and "What happened as a result of the post?" Open-ended questions provided the opportunity to collect narratives and themes related to the inquiries that were socially constructed by the people who experienced them (Charmaz, 2006).

Data Analyses. Once collected, the surveys remained in groups associated with each course. I assigned a course number to each grouping and ascribed each survey a participant case number. Assigning a case number (e.g., "P24") aided in the data entry and analysis process, as demonstrated in the Chapter 4 Results section. From the surveys, I transcribed quantitative responses to a code sheet. From there I entered the data into an Excel spreadsheet. Missing data responses were coded with a "." as recommended by a university SPSS consultant. Finally, I imported data from the Excel spreadsheet into an SPSS file for further analysis.

In order to encapsulate qualitative data, I transcribed responses by survey question number (with participant case numbers referenced) to Microsoft Word. As recommended by Saldaña (2016), I coded qualitative short responses using pre-coding, First Cycle and Second Cycle coding techniques. (These techniques are explained below.) A code is "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for an element of language-based or visual data (p. 4). In the context of understanding emergent themes, Charmaz considers coding an important link between the collection and meaning of observations (2006). The goal of coding, an interpretive act, is to find patterns that are "repetitive, regular, or consistent occurrences of action/data that appear more than twice" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 5), which enable the development of broader categories and themes.

Saldaña suggests that pre-coding includes a cursory review of the data set, along with highlighting and underlining, and otherwise noting significant information. Therefore, I read each participant's short answer while transcribing the responses into Microsoft Word. After printing the qualitative data set, I read the responses again to note

reoccurring words and phrases. After familiarity with the corpus was obtained, I began the next cycle of coding.

First cycle coding is the initial process of systematic notation of symbols or observations from the data set. One or more first cycle coding methods may be employed depending on the research questions and unique data presented. According to Saldaña, data coding is an iterative and cyclical process between the data set and the research, and multiple coding methods can be used simultaneously. For the current study, I chose Descriptive, In-Vivo, and Emotion first cycle coding. Descriptive coding is also called topic coding and is used to find a word or phrase summarizing the data topic. In-Vivo coding, also known as literal coding, uses participants' exact words or phrases as code. From an interpretive perspective, this approach allows the respondents' words to determine the code. Emotion coding advises to "label the emotions recalled and/or experienced by the participant, or inferred by the researcher about the participant" (2016, p. 125). This type of coding is useful when asking a question about feelings.

These first cycle coding methods were employed to 'let the data speak' while creating topic words for each survey response. During the reading of participant responses, I highlighted specific Descriptive, In-Vivo, or Emotion words or phrases relative to the research question. For example, when asked "What reasons best explain why you posted it?", many respondents answered with Emotion codes such as "angry" or "upset", which I highlighted for future interpretation.

Second cycle coding seeks to "develop a sense of categorical, thematic, conceptual, and/or theoretical organization from your array of first cycle codes" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 234). One such method, Pattern coding, is used to "identify an emergent theme,

configuration, or explanation" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 86). Although two related studies examine social media use and regret within the context of either privacy management (Wang et al., 2011) or self-disclosure (Xie & Kang, 2015), the newness of understanding how this phenomenon intersects with current communication theories implies that the field would benefit from identifying emergent patterns. Therefore, after completing first cycle coding, I then grouped patterns of codes for second cycle coding into categories describing each particular situation. My interpretation of meaning and social media use helped to define each category, further aiding in the revelation of themes attributed to each research question.

Since the qualitative component of the method design takes priority in this study, the quantitative element played an assisting role in explaining the relationship of frequency of social media posting to instances of regret. Pearson's Chi-square analysis was performed to answer RQ6: Is there a relationship in the frequency of social media use before and after experiencing regret? Chi-square (X^2) is used to test for associations between two categorical variables (Privitera, 2015). This measure determined the data's goodness of fit in the relationship tested by comparing frequencies observed to the theoretically expected number of frequencies. When X^2 is significant ($p < .001$), association between the two variables tested is affirmed.

In addition, another test for data with ordinal scales proved useful. The Wilcoxon Signed Ranks T Test measures the statistical significance comparing two dependent samples. The use of this test is indicated for non-parametric variables, including those with an ordinal scale. Making no assumptions regarding the distribution of data, the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test calculates the mean of the dependent variable before and

after the named treatment, producing a *Z*-score, a *p*-value of significance and an *r*-value

for effect size (Conduct and Interpret, n.d.; Privitera, 2015). Because the social media use

frequency variables offered in the current study survey (see Questions 26, 36, and 58 in

Appendix B) indicate a ranking measure, rather than an equidistant interval or ratio scale,

the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks T test allowed me to make appropriate inferences of data

comparing how often participants reported posting to social media before and after

experiencing regret.

Chapter 4

Results

This chapter will provide the results and analysis of the current study. First, descriptive statistics of the sample demographics will be listed. Second, descriptive statistics of social media use will be provided. Finally, data and analysis for each research question will be explained.

Demographics

Of the participants reporting, 66.8% ($n = 221$) were female, 32.6% ($n = 108$) were male, and 0.6% ($n = 2$) reported as other. The average age of participants was 20, with ages ranging from 18 to 55 years. In self-reporting of college grade levels, 48.6% ($n = 161$) were freshmen, 24.8% ($n = 82$) were sophomores, 16.9% ($n = 56$) were juniors, 8.8% ($n = 29$) were seniors, and 0.9% ($n = 3$) was a graduate or other leveled student. Within the sample population, 60 different study majors were declared. The top five majors indicated were Communication (12.4%, $n = 41$), Nursing (9.4%, $n = 31$), Biology (8.5%, $n = 28$), Psychology (7.6%, $n = 25$), and Exercise Science (6.7%, $n = 22$).

While most respondents were citizens of the United States (96.4%, $n = 320$), 3.6% ($n = 12$) were international students. In terms of racial diversity, respondents answered as reported in Table 1:

Table 1

Race

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Hispanic/Latino/Latina	137	41.3	41.3
Caucasian	112	33.7	33.7
Asian/Pacific islander	21	6.3	6.3
Mixed race	20	6.0	6.0
Native American	17	5.1	5.1
African American	15	4.5	4.5
Other	6	1.8	1.8
Prefer not to answer	4	1.2	1.2
Total	332	100.0	100.0

Social Media Use

Following the questions about demographic categories, participants were asked general questions regarding social media use. As expected, the overwhelming majority (94.3%, $n = 312$) of students in the target population currently use social media, while 4.2% ($n = 14$) used social media previously and currently do not, as reported in Table 2.

Table 2

Currently Use Social Media

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	312	94.0	94.3	94.3
	Previous	14	4.2	4.2	98.5
	Never	5	1.5	1.5	100
	Total	331	99.7	100	
Missing	System	1	0.3		
Total		332	100.0		

Although some participants reported they used social media previously and currently do not, a follow-up question was not offered to discover the reason for termination of social media use. However, based on the study's target population of college students and the researcher's cursory review of all survey data, several speculative explanations could be warranted, including: lack of time due to other obligations, such as school or employment; dissatisfaction with a social media experience; diminished novelty; or the experience of regret itself.

Participants ($N = 327$, 5 missing) reported social media posting frequency as follows:

- 32% - multiple times a day (coded as 6)

- 9% - once daily (coded as 5)

- 26% - a few times a week (coded as 4)

- 21% - a few times a month (coded as 3)

- 11% - less than once a month (coded as 2)

- 1% - never (coded as 1)

The average posting frequency ($M = 4.26$) falls between users posting once daily and a few times per week. The median posting frequency of 4, indicates the most prevalent posting rate of respondents as a few times a week. When the survey was administered, all students were encouraged to participate, regardless of whether they use social media and no matter the particular social network site used. Therefore, these statistics represent *any* SNS use.

Respondents were also asked if they ever created a member profile on a number of popular SNSs, with results reported in Table 3:

Table 3

Social Media Profiles

Social Media	Frequency	Valid Percent
Facebook	308	94.5
Snapchat	277	85.0
Instagram	266	81.6
YouTube	225	69.0
Twitter	205	62.0
Pinterest	179	54.9
Google+	119	36.5
Tumblr	105	32.2
Other	61	18.7
LinkedIn	21	6.4

Finally, participants were asked, "Have you ever posted something (words, a photo, a video, something you shared, etc.) you later regretted?" Of 332 survey participants, 46.9% ($n = 152$) responded yes, 53.1% ($n = 172$) responded no, and 8 chose not to answer. To further explicate users' experiences of engaging with social media that resulted in an experience of regret, several research questions were explored.

Research Questions

The idea of communicating and interacting with others without the constraints of time and physical closeness appeals to any social media user. The commonality of smart phones and proliferation of multiple (even interconnecting) SNSs provide ample opportunity for technology owners to create text, photo, and video content and post almost anything, anytime and anywhere. The immediate nature of content dissemination and impossibility of content revocation has caused considerable consternation among

many affected by this phenomenon. Public figures and commoners alike cringe at the recollection of such an experience. A review of previous research justifies a further examination of how the concept of regret (Gilovich, Medvec & Kahneman,1998) intersects with social media users' goals of impression management (Goffman, 1959), self-regulation and self-reflective capabilities described within social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2002), and their ritual view of communication (Carey, 1989/2009),. To assess respondents' regretted social media experiences, information regarding users' episodes was analyzed and interpreted to answer several of the study's research questions.

RQ1: What are the Topics of Content that Social Media Users Regret Posting?

Social network sites require users to abide by content agreements when creating an account (Facebook Community Standards, n.d.). Other than criminal activity, threats, or distinctly offensive content, users enjoy a wide latitude of topic selection. Because of the open access to SNSs via mobile and computer devices, users are given ample opportunity and freedom to post self-constructed or self-important content. However, after posting, users sometimes regret the action. When asked about the topic of such a post, participants described a number of general topics as producing regretful postings. By coding answers to open-ended survey question 38, two overarching themes with a variety of categories emerged. The theme "association with self" contains topical categories specifically related to the survey respondent. On the other hand, the theme "association outside of self" includes topics the respondent created about others. Categories are as follows with detailed descriptions:

- Association with self
  - Personal matters

- Relationship matters

- Alcohol or drugs

- Profanity and obscenity

- School or team

  ▪ Association outside of self

  - Political and policy issues

  - Social observations

  - Cultural issues

Association with Self

Social media platforms allow several methods of communication, therefore regretful posts take multiple forms, including user generated words, photos, and videos. Among the corpus of survey data collected, respondents detailed expression of regretful topics depicting their own life or actions, generating the theme "Association with self."

Personal matters. In this capacity, personal matters include comments about self or the individual's current circumstance, "selfies" (photos taken of one's self), photos of personal matters, and expression of emotions and opinion.

Personal information. Personal matters, including the announcement of ordinary or special events, are often shared in close relationships (Hew, 2011; Ophus & Abbitt, 2009; Pembek, Yermolayeva & Calvert, 2009). P2 posted a "photo of me and a friend after we walked in the rain for 20 min for pizza." One user posted "too much personal info" (P208), while P249 announced her engagement. Another explained, "It was just information proliferation. I wanted others to know I got a new phone #" (P118). Other personal matters may contain a more expressive element resulting in regret.

While users can post content easily and immediately, social media offers the opportunity for some to use it as a diary. The venting of one's personal emotions was also recounted frequently. A participant described, "It was personal information about how I was feeling that wasn't anyone's business" (P60). Another "revealed my emotions too much or interests that are not very widely shared" (P277) leaving the user feeling exposed.

Personal recollection. In addition to informing and venting, others lamented personal matters displayed during their adolescence. By recollecting a stage of development, P83 stated, "What it was, was just stupid things a middle-schooler might say on social media; really just stupid." Another explained, "It was about myself, information that was really immature" (P83). Similarly, other users shared, "I used to write statuses on Facebook, and my spelling was awful. I also took weird/embarrassing pictures of my friends and I" (P146) and "I used to post stupid immature posts at a young age" (P189).

Personal images. With still and video cameras included in smart phones, the topic "personal matters" often included photos or videos. Some stated simply, "It was a picture of myself" (P62), (I) "posted a bad picture" (P77), or "a picture of myself complaining about life" (P296). Showing concern for image presentation, others offered "I uploaded a photo of my new hair, but my hair did not look good" (P206) or a "photo of an ugly selfie" (P145). Some noted visual images that conveyed the topic of safety:

> I was on vacation in Mexico last summer for 4th of July weekend and I remember my parents telling me that I was not allowed to post anything about being out on

vacation on social media because it triggers home invasions. Of course I forgot

and ended up posting up a picture of the beautiful view from the balcony."(P126)

While trying to affirm safety concerns, P128 wrote, "I had crashed and uploaded a picture

of my car thanking everyone for caring; also letting other people know about my car

accident and telling them I was ok."

Personal emotions. Looking for attention or emotional sharing, P287

remembered "talking about my feelings for my personal life" while one participant

quoted a movie with the post, "I didn't ex-ctly stick, the f*cking landing" (P170).

Another recalled, "The topic was on doing well in school. However, I later felt like it was

gloating and I would prefer to remain modest" (P172). Venting or negative comments

included "not caring if people like me" (P207), "negative Tweets about a bad day"

(P290), or P268's sharing of "dark thoughts/pessimistic cry for help: 'Another year gone,

any and all effort wasted. So much closer to death…'" These examples display

individualized personal matters expressed in textual and visual formats. In addition, many

respondents also regretted posting to social media about relationship matters.

Relationships. As social beings, people navigate different types of relationships.

The survey data collected for this study represent three main sub-categories of

relationships as topics of regret: dating, family, and other.

Positive dating relationships. Dating relationship topics include positive,

potential, and previous dating. Although counterintuitive, some users regretted positive

posts about dating. The regret stemmed from revealing too much, receiving criticism, or

feeling silly. Examples of dating post topics described as positive included: "a picture of

me and my boyfriend kissing" (P57), a "picture of then boyfriend" (P99), "video of my

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boyfriend and I for our 2 year anniversary; videos of us being cute together" (P223), "I posted that I loved my boyfriend at 15 years old" (P235), and "It was a series of posts about my relationship with my best friend leading to us getting engaged without even dating first" (P249).

Potential dating relationships. Topics focusing on potential dating relationships describe P131 sharing, "I made a post about a guy I had a crush on, and I was basically talking about how he didn't seem to notice me." Others admitted, "I wrote about a friend who liked a guy and it totally embarrassed her" (P127) and "Trying to flirt with somebody, and it did not end well. I was being too forward and aggressive" (P193).

Previous dating relationships. Some users posted about previous dating relationships that had since terminated. These posts were often combined with emotional sharing, such as "It was a lyric of a song. I had just broken up with a boyfriend and was mad at him. I then posted something that described him from Mr. know it all – Kelly Clarkson" (P119), "I subtweeted my ex and was talking bad about her inconspicuously to my friends" (P100), and "I was mad at my boyfriend at the time so I tweeted something like how I deserve the best and basically things that made him look bad when really he didn't do anything and I was just angry" (P30). Acknowledging regret while also expressing delight, P46 stated, "I was mad at an ex and posted nasty things about them ha!"

Dating relationships and secrets. Surprisingly, some social media users revealed secrets affecting dating relationships. P82 remembered, "I took a picture of myself and another guy at a party and posted it on Snap Chat. (I told my boyfriend I wasn't going out

that night)" and P210 "posted a picture with my boyfriend but my family doesn't know about him. From my post they were able to look him up and find out I was Gay".

Family relationships. Besides dating relationships, many study participants recalled posting topics about family relationships, often in anger. Noting that mothers are sometimes the target, P4 stated, "I was putting my mom on blast for the whole world to see", P252 said, "It was just about how much I hated my mom", while another published, "I am pissed at my mother-in-law that she doesn't ask about her grandchild" (P186). Aimed at no one in particular, one person recalled the topic of, "How family events use to be only shared with family and friends-now strangers were welcome to look at and critique my intimate moments (after people posts pics when I subtly requested them not to)" (P298). Aside from anger, in sadness one individual shared, "I posted about how I miss my big brother and sister and said how I wish I could have them to show me around and have a bigger influence on my life" (P34).

Other relationships. Some relationship posts involved those other than dating or family connections. One person recounted posting "video of friends" (P143), causing "drama" and another stood up for a cause by saying, "People really need to get over themselves and learn to respect other people. You're so pathetic and immature, and I can't believe I let you in my life." I was mad at a friend who was trash talking a girl with depression (P144). Again, examples include posts made in anger, such as a "Reply to someone that pissed me off. I bashed them hard and everyone in the comments said I was 'savage.' The user blocked me after that haha" (P 190), the admission of "I was being mean to someone that I didn't like" (P205), and P224's taunt, "If she wants to fight me then she can come to my house."

Relationship bullying. Other respondents admitted tactics that some would consider bullying, such as name-calling and harassing. For example, P6 states, "in retaliation for a fight and a girl speaking bad about my mother I posted on her FB names like, "bitch," "worthless whore," "no one likes you," and I later posted an embarrassing/nasty photo of her. I wanted to teach her a lesson to not speak of my mother the way she did." Similarly, P142 admitted "calling a girl a 'white trash bitch' going on about how much people 'f*cking hate her' while P43 recalled a post "about a girl I didn't like, I called her fat." Others relayed, "My post was about one of my old friends she is totally fake and spread so much hate about me just because we had a fallout. I will never speak to her again and I said "stupid bitch." It was a subtweet to let her know I knew that she was talking about me" (P63), and "Well, the girl looked like a squirrel so we made a comparison picture of her and the squirrel" (P222).

Alcohol or drugs. While relationship topics included positive and negative posts in both text and visual form, posts about alcohol and drugs also showed suspension of best judgment. As previously established, a common practice with using social media is to post selfies and photos of events in order to share life experiences with networked friends and family. It is also known that alcohol and drug use alter the user's ability to use sound judgment (College-Age, n.d.). Related to this, several participants offered examples of posts showing use or implied use of alcohol or drugs. In a general reference, P211 recalled "A picture of friends and I that made us look like we were making bad decisions."

Alcohol. Specific to alcohol use, users shared, "The post included a drunken picture of myself and a friend. I said something about not regretting anything on the post"

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(P29), "It was a picture of a drunk friend" (P123), and "Was intoxicated at a pool party surrounded by shirtless guys, when I am in a serious committed relationship. The Snapchat read, 'Doesn't get better than this!!! College is great!!!'" (P79).

Drugs. Referring to drug use, surveys relayed "Two pictures; one of me, another of my friend smoking weed" (P98) and "I posted a picture on Instagram, and in the picture a bong could be seen" (P175). In addition to the freedom to post alcohol and drug use, users easily published content relating to profanity and obscenity.

Profanity and obscenity. Given the relaxed tenor of conversational language, public profanity has become common (Dickerson, 2010). Profanity is considered coarse or vulgar language. Obscene content includes nudity and the like, while offensive content encompasses hate speech and racist and slanderous comments (Obscenity, Indecency, n.d.). Although social media service providers permit profanity (e.g., Community Standards, n.d.), users report experiencing regret over this topic.

Profanity. Situations given include, "I unnecessarily was arguing with a classmate. I used vulgar language, such as "f*ck" and got riled up over an irrelevant subject" (P204) and "accused someone of knocking me out of motor race and swore at him" (P273).

Obscenity. Nudity is also a cause for regret. When deciding to enter a contest, P16 related, "my two friends and I posted pictures on this website. We didn't wear shirts but had pasties on our breasts with 'x.'" The post became a problem when their student body and school administrators saw the post. Others also claimed regret saying, "On Snapchat it was a nude photo of myself; it was a good one though! And tasteful" (P132) and "picture of myself naked" (P266).

Offensive content created by users included text detailed as "a post regarding how gay Twilight is" (P194) and an "inappropriate song: 'no bite marks, but tattoos & hickies'" (P288). Visual offensive contents were also posted such as "a picture of the Confederate flag" (P299), a "photo not well liked or socially acceptable" (P267) and "I posted a inappropriate dance video to the public. I was a competitive hip hop dancer and realized my audience found it obnoxious and inappropriate to share" (P133). Each user came to realize in a way (to be explored later in the study) that the content was considered offensive.

School or team. Wang et al. proposed a topic category of "work and company" (2011). However, given the current population of participants, school or team was referenced several times and created for this study. Although some posted topics were considered cross-categorical (alcohol and school), those with a predominant school or team emphasis were placed in that category. For example, P61 admitted "I was saying how 'cool' I was in a video while smoking marijuana, and at the time I was wearing a school T-shirt & proceeded to make our mascot look like it was smoking" while P292 posted "a picture of friends drinking alcohol and the coach saw it." Benignly, one helpful student recounted "I don't remember the question, but I took a picture of a practice test for the SAT. The question related to something my friends and I talked about. I tagged three of my friends in the post, so they would see it." Chaos ensued when people who saw the post thought it was an actual question from the SAT exam, warranting a trip to the principal's office.

Accidental. While some posts are made in an altered state and some are intentional, others specifically described posts as being accidental in terms of who was

meant to see the content versus who actually saw the content. Social media applications

allow users to select public and private settings as a default and with each individual post.

In detailing the topics of these accidental posts, users recounted, "Love. I sent a pic of a

heart with 'I love you' to a person who it wasn't supposed to go to. Supposed to be my

GF, instead to another girl. It was sent by accident" (P80), "Accidentally posting a

private picture, when it was meant to be sent privately" (P192) and "picture of self meant

to go to one person privately" (P260).

Association Outside of Self

While the majority of users recalled posting regrettable content relating to

themselves and their close personal networks, others listed topics with an outward focus.

These topics were categorized as political and policy issues and society and cultural

issues.

Political and policy issues. Users also reported regretfully sharing or reposting

someone else's content, such as a news article. Often political topics, societal issues, or

opinions relating to culture were the reason for users wishing they could retract the post.

Regarding health policy, one participant explained the following:

The topic was the anti-vaccination movement. It was a piece of anti-vaccination

propaganda that distorted facts about vaccination and used outdated information

and false claims not based on any form of empirical evidence. In an effort to

hopefully keep people from buying the absurd propaganda, I composed a rather

lengthy comment explaining why the above article was pure snake oil in the most

respectful and non-confrontational way I could manage and even cited several

scientific articles in reputable journals that could be found online and posted links

to them. (P31)

As with many political posts, several people who do not know one another add to the

commentary. Similarly, P81 remembered:

The topic was weight loss and animal rights. The posts weren't rolled into one,

but the same people were involved in the same thread. Someone posted what I

thought was an ignorant comment and I said, 'What an ignorant douchebag, eh?'

Later thinking that I didn't know the relationship behind that person and the

wall's owner or the context in which the ignorant statement was said. (P81)

With another political topic, one user shared, "A girl I knew posted something about 9/11

on 9/11 that painted our troops in a negative light. I told her to move to the Middle East

and see how the extremists would treat her versus how she was treated here since she

sympathized with them too much and wasn't patriotic" (P103). Each of these examples

conveys the passionate nature of opinion-filled topics.

Social observations. Another way users express their opinions on social media is

by commenting on observations or experiences with society. For example, one

respondent described an experience in public with the following:

I made a post about an event I witnessed while taking the train home. I

commented about a man who had made a racist remark and refused to sit near a

black man. I described the event in my post and then wrote out a rude name for

the man. (P41)

Others expressed, "sharing opinions about rape, race, other sensitive topics" (P258) and

remembered:

Kinda can't stand when people post that they are bored. I am never bored and

always have so much to clean or study for, I just don't comprehend being bored.

Come on people get motivated and do some crafts, exercise or read a book.

(P158)

Cultural Issues. Along with expressing opinions on political topics and societal

observations, users also express regrettable opinions and observations about general

cultural issues. For example, P33 claims, "LOL I thought I knew sports but I definitely

didn't and was talking about football." Other users confessed, "gloating about an incident

where Taylor Swift had done something nice" (P269) and writing "a post about Elon

Musk that was in error" (P293).

In summary, topics of regretful social media posts include two themes: associated

with self and associated outside of self. Topics associated with self, the respondent,

include personal matters, relationship matters, alcohol or drugs, profanity and obscenity,

and school or team. Topics associated outside of the respondent include political and

policy issues, social observations, and cultural issues.

RQ2: How do Social Media Users Realize Regret Resulting From Posts?

Regret resulting from online social media posts must be realized by the user in

order for regret to form. Gilovich, Medvec & Kahneman (1998) describe action regret as

creating a hot state of emotions that are immediate and intense. Based on the coding of

survey responses, two major categories prompt realization of regret: Internal awareness

and outside awareness.

Internal awareness. Internal awareness of regret realization may take place through cognitive mindfulness, empathy, recognition of the level of self-worth or need for outside validation, or because of a status change, according to survey results.

Cognitive mindfulness. For example, cognitive mindfulness was demonstrated when several participants reported reviewing their post and they became aware of their own bad decisions or conscious that they had made a mistake. Users shared "I read the various comments and just thought about it for awhile" (P41), "I realized I looked ridiculous 'crying' over social media" (P42), "I felt insecure about it" (P60), and mistakenly "when I realized it hadn't gone only to my boyfriend" (P132).

Empathy. Along with cognitive realizations, users also expressed emotional awareness of feeling badly by offering, "I would never say that about someone if I wasn't mad" (P43) and "I felt pretty awful for hurting someone's feelings" (P81). Emotional realization was also expressed through empathy with "I thought of how people would view me, and how the other person would feel" (P144) and "I wouldn't want it done to me" (P277).

Self-worth. Others recognized self-worth recounting, "only because I shouldn't have gone to her level" (P63) and regret "after finding self-worth in more than my body" (P195).

Outside validation. Similarly, some admitted seeking outside validation and not receiving it: P3 stated, "I didn't get any likes right away," while P276 said, "it was not receiving the response my posts normally do (the number of likes)."

Status change. Some users realized regret when the status of the post topic changed. With alcohol involved, P185 came to such a realization when, "I woke up

sober" and "by seeing it the next day sober" (P236). Others noted the problem shared in the post was resolved by stating, "we became friends again, but it wasn't the same after" (P6), "because I met so many new people here in [named school] and became friends" (P129) and "when the relationship changed I realized I regretted the post" (P263). Occasionally the status of the problem changed when more about the situation became known, such as "new information about that night surfaced" (P29) and "I checked facts after" (P293). Sometimes the hot emotional state in which posts were made waned as time passed, causing users to recollect "I reread it when I calmed down" (P124), "I was looking at really old stuff I had posted in the past, saw it, and asked myself 'why the f*ck did I post that?'" (P170) and "I reread the posts with a new mindset after time passed" (P290). Others learned of the ramifications of social media and stated "a teacher was talking about employers checking employees' social media accounts" (P98) and "it felt like something unprofessional" (P159).

Outside awareness. Realization of regretting social media posts occurred not only through participants' own internal awareness, but also outside-of-self awareness. Outside awareness takes place when others seeing the post react with displeasure to the content creator. The central conduit to outside awareness took place through confrontation, including others' comments or fighting within the posts, comments made to the respondent, receiving an unfavorable consequence, or conversation with the target of the post.

Confrontation. Respondents reported realization of regret through others' comments and fighting within the original post by saying "my family started fighting

over the post and I got scared" (P34) and "people arguing made me uncomfortable" (P258).

Direct comments. In addition to social network friends fighting within the post comments, people also comment directly to the participant who made the post, aiding in the realization of regret. Contributors shared, "There were so many replies to my comment claiming I was some kind of government paid sheep or misinformation agent trying to 'stop the truth from coming out'" (P31), while P61 stated, "my best friend called me and knocked some sense into me". Others claimed, "My friend told me I shouldn't have alcohol on social media" (P84), "I was yelled at by a teacher I respected" (P222), and I realized it "when people were making fun of me" (P57).

Consequences. Additionally, some participants came to realize their regret upon receiving a consequence as a result of the post. For example, P43 " lost a relationship," P190 "got banned" from Instagram, P45 "got in trouble and was called into the office," and P99 realized regret "after this person broke up with me."

Target of post. Lastly, through conversation with the person targeted by the post, P252 came to realize regret when "my mom talked to me about how it made her feel," P274 "was told by the friend it was wrong," and P158 read "her comments; my post was meant to motivate, not attack."

To summarize, social media users come to realize regret resulting from posts through either internal or outside-of-self awareness. Internal awareness takes place within the social media user and is provoked by cognitive mindfulness, feelings of empathy, personal recognition of level of self-worth or need for outside validation. Internal awareness of regret can also occur after a change in status concerning the topic posted.

Outside awareness, that from outside forces, is sparked by confrontation within the post, comments from others, receiving an unfavorable consequence, or a direct response from the target of the post.

RQ3: For What Reason Do Social Media Users Post Regrettable Content?

Regardless of the outcome of creating and posting content, it is important to understand why users make a post to begin with, particularly in situations where users later regret the post. Through coding respondent recollections of the reason users posted content they later regretted, three main themes emerged: positive expression, neutral expression, and negative expression.

Positive Expression. For those claiming to posting content for positive expression that later became regrettable, some wanted to motivate others' perceptions of self and others wanted to motivate others to think about or do something.

Motivate others' perceptions of self. Reasons social media posters offered to motivate others' perceptions of self, the way the respondent was viewed, included: to be funny, share life, share an image, share an opinion, portray love, or be cool. Much like telling a joke in a face-to-face conversation, people often use humor as a reason to post to social media. For example, P2, P3, P44, P102, P127, P143, P194, and P274 explained with the exact same phrase, "I thought it was funny." Others gave similar variations like, "I wanted my friends to have a laugh because they were stressing at the time, since it was toward the end of our junior year" (P225) and "I thought it would make me look funny and popular" (P301).

Along with being funny, some posters simply wanted to share part of their life with "I wanted people to know I was having a good time" (P84) and "I felt the need to

make that memory public" (P280). Others were focused on sharing their image as they explained, "I thought I looked great" (P145) and "I looked good in the picture" (P185).

Along with looking good, some people wanted to share an opinion and confessed, "I found it necessary to let my input be heard" (P157) or "I thought it exemplified a reasonable stance on the issue well" (P258). Besides sharing an opinion, some wanted to show their love and explained, "I thought I was in love" (P99) or "Everyone wanted to know about our "perfect" relationship" (P249). Another positive motivator expressed was to be "cool" as "I thought it would be cool. But NOOOO. I had to post that" (P32) and "I wanted to look cool and hip at a party" (P82).

Motivating others to think about or do something. Besides motivating others' perceptions of self, some social media users posted regrettable content for the purpose of motivating others to think about or do something, including sharing information, managing relationships, taking a stand, to motivate, to entertain, and to relate or connect to others. Sharing information included, "Utility-info proliferation" (P118) and the following:

> I wanted to give people accurate information and expose the falsehoods in the above article and give people the tools to make an informed decision on vaccination. I've read too many news stories about children dying because parents believed the anti-vaccination rhetoric and read no credible studies on how vaccines cause autism. (P31)

Managing relationships displayed as, "Would make the girl like me," (P147) and "To end the bullying" (P224). Taking a stand was explained as, "It's a belief I have and important to my family" (P299) as well as, "I was angry and emotional. I'm a very

patriotic person and I don't tolerate people bashing our military" (P103). In an effort to

motivate an action, participants explained, "I thought it sounded motivating, like why be

'bored,' there are endless things to do!" (P158). To entertain, P260 shared, "It was a

private joke" and P228 recalled, "I thought it was entertaining." Finally, some were

trying to relate or connect to others and explained, "I thought it was something a lot of

people could relate to" (P1) and "I just missed them and thought I would tell them"

(P34).

Neutral expression. Positive themes of posting content were described as well

intentioned. However, some had neutral or unintentional agendas. These categories

included people who were not really thinking at the time of creating the post, those whose

thinking was altered with alcohol or drugs, and those who made a mistake.

Participants who admitted not thinking described this scenario with, "Honestly,

just to do it. Didn't think rationally" (P16) or "Not thinking about consequences" (P267).

People who were altered claimed, "Was intoxicated and upset that my boyfriend was at a

party at this school with girls all around him" (P79) and simply, "I was drunk" (P174).

One respondent who made a mistake claimed, "Didn't think I would send it to the wrong

person. No concerns" (P80).

Negative expression. In addition to positive and neutral themes participants

posted to social media, some also expressed themselves with negative posts. Categories

include: depressed, anger, immaturity, upset, venting, to attack with words, to expose, to

explain (a negative situation), for attention, conflict management, to defend a friend, to

argue and to irritate. One participant explained, "I was angry and really depressed" (P4)

while others claimed, "I was angry and did it out of spite" (P171) or "I was angry but I

am a passive-aggressive person" (P298). One respondent admitted immaturity with, "I let my anger and immaturity get the best of me" (P30) while P267 was "not thinking about consequences." Sharing hot states of feeling upset and venting, contributors offered, "someone had to hear it" (P120), "I was upset, and wanted the person who made me upset to feel bad" (P42), "I thought I should just let my feelings out" (P131), and sharing "to get my feelings off my chest" (P252). To attack with words or expose, participants admitted, "I wanted the other person to feel stupid" (P204), "I wanted her to know that she was fake" (P63), while P123 wanted to "show what was happening" and P100 stated, "I wanted to bring light to how things were between us to other people."

Within a fighting situation, P268 offered an explanation to the social media network with, "I had tried other methods of communication with him and I felt like I needed to express myself to someone or something," whereas P124 tried the approach of "I thought it would make the other person understand." Also during a low point, P170 posted, "probably just for attention." Within the context of conflict management, still others used social media posts to get a reaction or retaliate. Posters described, "I thought it would open his eyes to how much he cares about me" (P29),"I wanted to talk to someone" (P185), and "My ex boyfriend was posting shit about me on Twitter so I retaliated by responding negatively" (P297). Still others tried to defend a friend, argue, or irritate networked contacts. These posts were described with, "I was attempting to stick up for my friend" (P81), "I was very angry, and I wanted to defend the girl who was getting talked bad about" (P144), "I was arguing back" (P142), "I was just carrying on the back-and-forth we'd been sending each other" (P132), and "To irritate my boyfriend" (P156).

In summary, respondents reported initial themes of positive, neutral, and negative expression as reasons for creating content that was later regretted. While social media users initiate content creation with positive, neutral, or negative intentions, the outcomes do not always align with expectations. Consequences and ramifications resulting from social media posts must be addressed within the socially networked public. For that reason, it is important to understand the following research question:

RQ4: What Consequences Stem From Regrettable Social Media Posts?

Upon performing qualitative coding, four major themes of consequences emerged from the data: Nothing, negative association with self, negative association with others, and positive consequences. Although many respondents claimed there were no consequences to a regrettable post, other participants described consequences deemed to be positive. Positive consequences constitute outliers to what would typically be perceived as a negative situation.

Negative association with self. Negative consequences stemming from a regrettable social media post that were in association with self include embarrassment or shame, creating another problem, and feeling sorry for self. Respondents expressed embarrassment and shame by recalling, "Embarrassed; felt bad for making others feel attacked" (P1) and "I was embarrassed and mortified" (P259). Perpetuating the problem, P124 claimed, "I was really embarrassed and ashamed and created another issue." Another participant offered the self-infliction of, "I got in trouble, I was embarrassed; I felt sorry for myself." (P128).

Negative association with others. Besides creating conflict in association with self, some negative consequences related to association with others including: being

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perceived differently, getting in trouble, altering friendships, the school/team finding out, having to apologize, being disappointed by others, and causing a fight or argument. Feeling the perception of being looked at differently, P4 stated, "People looked at me different though, especially my mom's friends" and P29 lamented, "I lost all contact with my then boyfriend and have a bad reputation with anyone at that party." Explaining the consequence of trouble and friendship changes, P6 wrote, "I got in trouble with my parents and our friendship was never the same" while P249 shared, "lost a lot of friendships and my relationship is now close to gone." Some participants recalled their consequence of the posts being exposed to a school or team by sharing, "My school found out and most of the student body" (P16) and "Since it was on school grounds. I was suspended for 3 days" (P61). Seeking to mitigate the event, P30 shared, "I apologized and was forgiven and to this day I NEVER post my business or feelings about someone or with someone else." Relaying disappointment in others as a consequence, P31 described:

It simply disappointed me. The responses I got upset me because I knew the responses stemmed from paranoia, misinformation, or simple lack of critical thinking skills. I didn't exactly regret the post itself. I just didn't like being labeled as ignorant by people who didn't even understand how vaccination worked, as exposed by their own comments incorrectly explaining vaccination.

In terms of fighting, arguing and making enemies, respondents shared, "I stopped using social medias for 6 months and my family is still in a fight today" (P34), "My friends argued with me and each other" (P258), and "I made enemies" (P46). Others claimed having to defend themselves during the interaction with, "Had to defend my post

when I was not even planning on having to comment ANYTHING on that post" (P158). Lastly, negative expression might lead to being banned from a social media platform entirely, as P190 shared, "I got banned."

Positive consequences. Unexpectedly, some positive consequences were shared from regrettable social media posts. These categories include: better relationships, agreement from others, getting a response needed overall, and feeling better. An improvement in relationship was shared by P252 with, "My mother and I got a better relationship." Others noted receiving affirmation by indicating, "People agreed" (P120) and "Some people talked to me more; others less" (P187). Other participants recollected getting an overall response in a difficult situation or feeling better by sharing, "Was embarrassed; unfriended by my ex; felt horrible; however did get a response from my family" (P268) and "Made me feel temporarily better about the breakup" (P270). In essence, while respondents regretted making the post, some acknowledged a specific positive outcome.

Whether a social media user experienced no consequences as a result of a regrettable post, negative, or even unexpected positive consequences, it is important to note why users ultimately regret posts as a means to better understand the communication process taking place. For that reason, the following research question is presented:

RQ5: Why Do Social Media Users Regret Posts?

Social media users regret making posts for a wide variety of motives. Based on qualitative coding methods, three main themes emerged to explain these reasons including: The way it made them feel (negative feelings), the way it made them look (negative image), or the negative outcome.

Negative feelings. Social media users self-reflectively regretted posting due to internal feelings of discord. For example, P3 reported feeling "self-conscious and worried/panicked." Others claimed the post revealed too much, feeling vulnerable, or allowing others to see mistakes such as, "All of my mom's friends knew stuff my mom didn't want them to know" (P4) and "Others seeing my past mistakes" (P5). Feelings of remorse were expressed by acknowledging it was wrong to post, "because I looked stupid and there are way bigger issues than a boy and it was wrong of me" (P30). Some felt embarrassment by claiming, "I don't want to give anyone a false idea of who I am. I try my hardest to give people my genuine self & that cannot be portrayed through social media" (P294). Others felt immature by admitting, "It was very immature!" (P46) or P156's account, "Because the fight turned on me and my "immaturity."

Other participants recalled feelings of empathy, remorse, and disappointment. Empathy was expressed as, "I would never want that said about me" (P43) and P160 realized they, "Didn't mean it." P31 felt disappointed but blamed it outward by stating:

> I regret posting it because it made me aware of how disturbingly illiterate people are when it comes to science and other matters. It's actually motivated me to become a teacher. I'd like to teach critical thinking because it is a skill that our schools are not adequately fostering. (P31)

Negative image. Besides thinking about how a regretful post made a social media user feel, respondents also expressed concern about how the post made them look to others. Concerns were expressed about being perceived as confrontational, stupid, stooping low, irresponsible, prideful, ugly, and not respecting oneself. P1 described, "I was too confrontational," whereas P83 stated, "It just made me sound stupid, which I

didn't like." P63 was discomforted, "because I went down to her level. I didn't take the high road" and P79 asserted, "It affected me, because now I sign out of all social media when I'm drinking." Others suggested perceptions, such as, "Because it was prideful" (P172), "I didn't look as good as I thought" (P206), and "I wasn't respecting myself" (P266).

Negative outcome. In addition to not liking the way the regrettable post made the user feel or look to others, some were dissatisfied with the post outcome. Reasons included hurting self or others, losing trust, sparking conflict, making the situation worse, getting into trouble, receiving negative feedback from friends, losing a friendship, being judged by others, or pointless efforts.

By admitting a hurtful outcome, P29 shared, "I hurt so many people, including myself" and P278 caused someone else harm and shared, "They were ridiculed by several others." In losing trust, P79 offered, "It hurt my boyfriend's feelings, and it made him feel like he couldn't trust me." Some posts create conflict demonstrated by responses such as "Because it offended my favorite person and everyone at my job talked about it" (P104). Equally, a post might make a situation more complex such as, "I should have gone to an authority figure first. The post only made the situation worse" (P45). Other reasons for regret include directly getting into trouble, such as, "I could've lost my position at my school – student body officer" (P61). Some respondents opened themselves to discontent by stating, "My friends weren't exactly planning to see me in my naked glory. I personally don't care, but I realize others do" (P132).

Relationships might also be affected, demonstrated by such responses as "I lost a really good friendship; it was very mean" (P228) or status change regret with, "Because

the relationship didn't end up working out and the post was up for everyone to see" (P265). Still others didn't like the outcome of being judged, or banned as explained by, "I don't want people to judge me by my consumption of weed" (P175) or "Because it [Instagram] banned me" (P90). Unrequited efforts were expressed with "I wish I could have worded it better to sound smarter, and to also make her feel worse about her post so she could think before she clicked 'share'" (P103) and "It was somewhat pointless" (P187).

In summary, regardless of the initial intentions of creating the social media post (addressed in RQ3), participants who reported a regrettable experience describe three main themes: negative feelings, negative image, and negative outcome. Along with deriving themes from user experiences of regret, it may also be helpful to understand the relationship in the frequency of posting to social media before and after these incidents. Therefore the following question is offered:

RQ6: Is There a Relationship in the Frequency of Social Media Use Before and After Experiencing Regret?

Exploring the frequency of posting behaviors may also shed some light on the reasons why social media users posted regrettable content. Respondents were asked how frequently they posted to the social media application they used for posting the reported incident of regret, both before and after the regretful experience. The six variables used included: Multiple times a day, once daily, a few times a week, a few times a month, less than once a month, and never. Using SPSS, Chi-square analysis was performed to test for significance of relationship for the variables overall before and after regret. Although some of the relationships showed significance, overall the tests were limited in statistical

inference because several data fields showed fewer than five responses. A Chi-square value cannot be calculated where the expected value is less than five (Privitera, 2015). However, this motivated the researcher to note an interesting trend surrounding the frequencies of use.

As detailed in Figure 4 and Table 4, a trend is shown between the variables of the most use frequency before and after regret (multiple times a day, once daily, and a few times a week) and the variables of the least use frequency before and after regret (a few times a month, less than once a month, and never). Specifically, 29 people posted multiple times a day before regret, while only 20 posted multiple times a day after regret; 19 people posted once daily before regret, while 10 posted once daily after regret; and 56 people posted a few times a week before regret while 46 people posted a few times a week after regret. Each of these variables shows a decreasing frequency of using the same social media application used after a regrettable post, suggesting that the experience of regret is correlated with less frequent social media use. Conversely, 24 people posted a few times a month before regret while 36 people posted a few times a month after regret; 15 people posted less than once a month before regret while 23 people posted less than once a month after regret; and 2 people never posted before regret while 10 people reported never posting after regret.

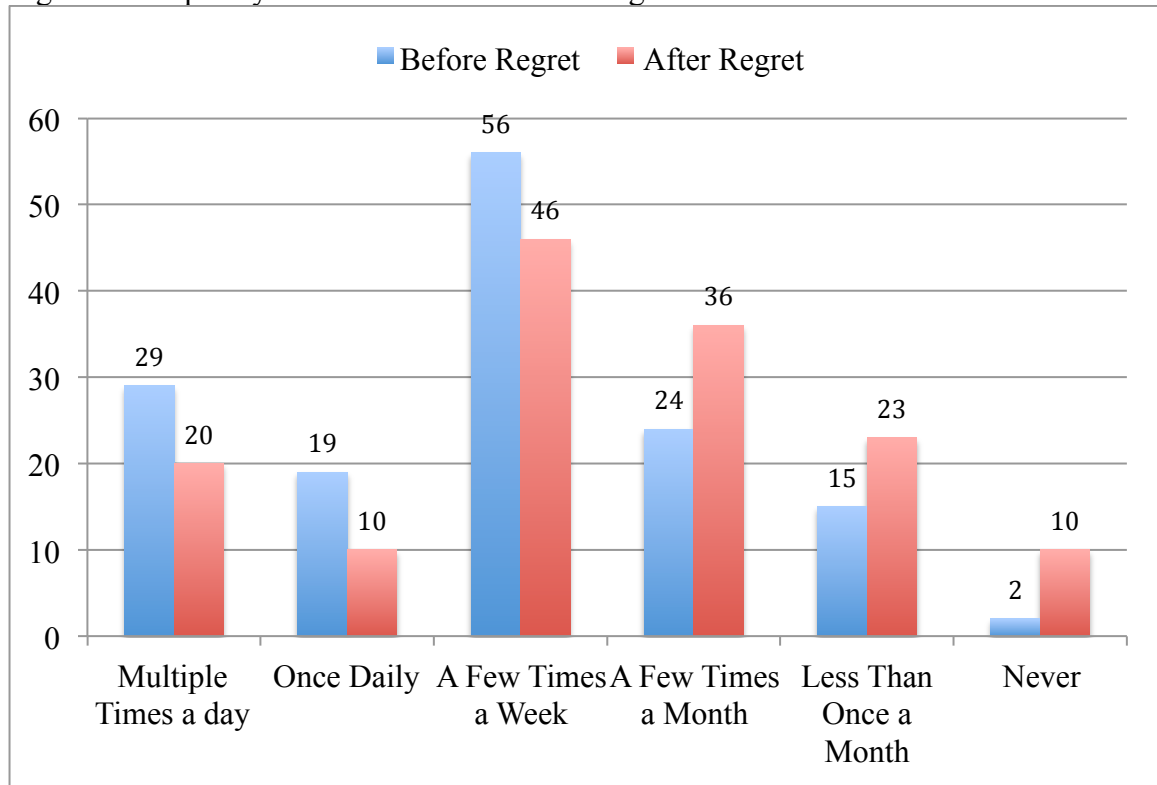Figure 4. Frequency of Use Before and After Regret Chart

Table 4: Frequency of Use Before and After Regret Crosstabulation

	Frequency of Use After Regret						
Frequency of Use Before Regret	Multiple times a day	Once daily	A few times a week	A few times a month	Less than once a month	Never	Total
Multiple Times a day	16	4	6	23	1	0	29
Once Daily	1	5	6	3	2	2	19
A Few Times a Week	2	1	32	13	6	2	56
A Few Times a Month	1	0	2	14	6	1	24
Less Than Once a Month	0	0	0	4	8	3	15
Never	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
Total	20	10	46	36	23	10	145

The data in Figure 4 and Table 4 show that the rise in the number of people posting less frequently after a regrettable experience is consistent with the decrease in users posting with high frequency after experiencing regret.

To investigate the significance of this finding, a Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test was performed. This test may be used for data without normal distribution and at least an ordinal scale of measure (Conduct and Interpret, n.d.). To further understand whether a statistically significant difference between the frequency of social media posting before and after an incident of regret exists, the ordinal data from survey questions numbered 36 and 58 were compared. When coded and entered into SPSS, rankings were assigned as follows:

- 6 – Multiple times a day

- 5 – Once daily

- 4 – A few times a week

- 3 – A few times a month

- 2 – Less than once a month

- 1 – Never

Based on the coding used, a higher number, rank, or mean indicates more frequent posting, and conversely, a lower number, rank, or mean indicates less frequent posting. The distribution of data indicated a normal bell curve. Noting the lower mean of a 3.59 rank measure of posting after experiences of regret (Table 5) compared to a higher mean of a 4.15 rank measure of posting before regret, participants indicated posting less frequently overall after experiencing regret.

Table 5

	M	SD	N	Z	p	r
Use Frequency Before Regret	4.15	1.274	151			
Use Frequency After Regret	3.59	1.408	146			
				-5.329	<.001	-0.31

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

The Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test indicated that the frequency of social media posting after incidents of regret was statistically significantly lower than the frequency of social media posting before incidents of regret, $Z = -5.329$, $p < .001$, with a moderate effect size ($r = -0.31$). The effect size is calculated using Cohen criteria as recommended by Pallant's SPSS Survival Manual (2007).

To summarize, social media users reported regretting posts composed of topics about themselves such as personal matters, relationship matters, alcohol or drugs, profanity and obscenity, and school or teams, as well as topics associated outside of themselves such as political, social, and cultural issues. Users report realizing regret through internal awareness (indications coming from within themselves) and outside awareness (indications made by others). Users initially report creating and posting content either for positive expression, for instance, to motivate others; neutral expression; and negative expression, for example, to vent anger. Consequences stemming from regrettable posts range from no consequence reported, to negative consequences associated with self and others. Conversely, positive outcomes were also described in some instances. Users discerned regretting posts due to the cause of negative feelings, negative image, and negative outcomes. Finally, users experiencing regret from using social media posted less frequently after the incident.

Chapter 5

Discussion

This chapter discusses research findings in relation to the theoretical body of knowledge on the concepts of regret, impression management, self-regulation and self-reflective capacities, and the ritual view of communication, presented in Chapter 2. Results of this study in relation to the theoretical framework presented in the literature review are addressed. Application to what these findings mean to the field of communication and social media users is discussed. Finally, limitations to the study and suggestions for directions of future research are offered.

Findings and Implications

The intent of this research was to gain a better understanding of social media use in situations where regrettable content was posted. Social network sites are prevalent, open access platforms for communicating with others, often with a high frequency and routine. Words, photos, and videos can all convey a user's message and impact the user's personal impression demonstrated to others. This study used primarily a qualitative, interpretive method of analyzing participant responses to survey questions surrounding instances of regret while engaging with social media. Descriptive statistics were also reviewed to understand the trend of use frequencies before and after regret experiences. This research explores a major gap in the literature: a failure to address instances of regret regardless of which social network site is employed. Other studies have explored a specific SNS, such as Facebook, looking at regret and privacy concerns or older adults' self-identity (Boydell, 2013; Wang et al., 2011); yet other research has focused on one specific communication concept, such as self-disclosure, self-presentation, or the ritual

view of communication using photos (Stern, 2015; Villi, 2006; Xie & Kang, 2015). This study is unique because use of any social network site was considered in terms of user experiences. Some respondents indicated concurrent multiple SNS use, which is a newer development given the recent proliferation of various SNSs. This study also addresses the relationship of social media use frequency with the experience of regret, a relationship not previously studied.

Through an analysis of the findings of this study, it is possible to gain further understanding into how the experience of regret defines and impacts a person's use of social media. The current study seeks to explain the conflation of the ritual view of communication during impression management while including self-regulatory and self-reflexive behaviors during an incident of regret. This understanding is accomplished by exploring emergent categories and themes from social media users as prompted by survey questions.

Regret. The concept of regret, as explicated by Gilovich, Medvec, and Kahneman (1998), outlines three main categories of regret: action regrets that create a hot state of emotions; inaction long-term, wistful regrets; and inaction despair regrets. Research by Wang et al. (2011) proposed that regret associated with social media use stems from action regrets. The findings of the current study are consistent with action regrets. Of the 152 surveys indicating a regrettable incident, none described feelings of regret resulting from inaction. However, the Gilovich et al. publication portrayed action regrets as creating a hot state of emotions that are immediate and intense. A cold emotional state is less measured and less inte0nse (What is a hot, 2013). The current study's findings suggest a broader experience of action regrets, including a cold state of emotions as well.

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Emotional states may differ before and after content posting. The emotional state in regret posting appears to be closely associated with content subjects and the degree of altered, cognitive, or emotional state of the user. Additionally, perhaps the dissonance between anticipated posting outcome and actual posting outcome could account for feelings of regret. Topically, participants described both intense and benign user-generated content. For example, some users reported producing messages because of anger, spite, defense, or retaliation. Others merely desired to share life experiences or inform their social networks about personal or public happenings. However, RQ2 (How do social media users realize regret resulting from posts?) gives insight into the emotional state of participants upon realization of regret. Hot states described include the user feeling badly, empathetic, ridiculous, sense of disappointment, fear, and anger upon realization. On the other hand, respondents also connected action regrets with cold states of emotion including: upon receiving additional information; waking up sober; looking back at old posts after maturing; or feeling silly.

Similarly, RQ4 (What consequences stem from regrettable social media posts?) solicited consequences stemming from regrettable posts. Several participants responded simply, "nothing." While one claimed, "we both just looked dumb" (P78), another confessed, "apologies were said and we were all okay" (P81). Other cold emotional states were described as, "people liked it" (P207) or "no immediate ramifications" (P147). While RQ5 asked, "Why do social media users regret posts?", the level of intensity was not included as part of the question. However, based on the responses listed previously, it is possible to experience regret without a hot or intense reaction.

These neutral answers suggest that an additional operational definition of a cold or sublime state can be contributed to the concept of action regret when related to a social media experience. Gilovich, Medvec, and Kahneman (1998) claim that action regrets result only in a hot state of emotions. However, in the current study, social media users self-reported action regrets that resulted in a cold emotional state as well. This finding suggests that action regrets can occur and result in both hot and cold emotional states.

Impression management. Goffman's impression management theory as applied to social media use encompasses the goal of identity expression through symbolic interaction, often in consideration of audience expectations, while aware of *modus vivendi*, or working consensus. This process may be difficult enough for some people during face-to-face interactions, as originally applied, and the difficulty is compounded without instant cues (such as facial expression or vocal tone). However, with the inexpressive divide of a computer or smartphone screen, the opportunity for impulsive, mistaken, or misunderstood irretractable messaging increases.

Identity expression and performance became most evident by reviewing responses to RQ3 and RQ5. RQ3 asked, "For what reasons do social media users post regrettable content?". Emerging themes included: positive expression, such as to motivate others' perceptions of self, and motivate others to think about or do something; neutral expression; and negative expression. In order to motivate others' perceptions of self, crafting the expression of self-identity, participants tried to be funny, look cool, share their life, share an image, share an opinion, or portray love. While motivating others to think about or do something, respondents tried to share information, manage relationships, take a stand, motivate, entertain, or connect with their audience.

Respondents reporting neutral expressions, such as not thinking, altered thinking (e.g., due to alcohol) or mistaken thinking expressed the difficulty in managing impressions of identity without posting in an intentional way. Likewise, those using negative expression such as venting emotions, vying for attention, or attacking words discussed the disruption of an expected code of conduct albeit through technology channels.

Furthermore, RQ5 asked why social media users regret posts and several respondents admitted that their identity presentation goal was not met. Some claimed disliking the way the regret made them feel related to appearance: self-conscious, feeling vulnerable (from revealing too much), or embarrassed. Others specifically addressed the negative way the regrettable post made them look to others: confrontational, stupid, irresponsible, prideful, ugly, impulsive, or not respecting oneself.

While constructive motivations may intersect specifically with the presentation of identity in a positive way, negative expressions, often in a hot state of emotion, likely did not follow the audience expectation of working consensus. Respondents admitted expressing anger, spite, venting various feelings, attacking with words, posting to get an inflammatory reaction or to retaliate, to argue, and to irritate. Working consensus presumes that one will hold back communication if it would cause a disagreement or conflict. The actors are expected to accept the definition in a social situation. By expressing themselves in an aggressive, confrontational, or inappropriate manner, users violated the working consensus rules of *modus vivendi*. When this happens, Goffman warns the presenter will feel embarrassed or discredited, the participants will feel "ill at ease," and the situations may become "untenable" (1959, p. 143).

The use of social media lends itself to a performative quality in self-identity because users concoct, create, and otherwise project a narrative of who they are and what their life is like. They can, however, disrupt the desired goal of this symbolic interaction by violating the assumed or demonstrated rules of a working consensus within their social media network. When this disruption occurs, either by the content creator or content receiver, feelings of regret may occur.

Social cognitive theory. Bandura's social cognitive theory also explains an individual's performance in social interactions, where personal agency is used to produce messages while others' modeling of expectations impacts decision-making. Bandura posits that internal experiences are related to external outcomes and the way actors view either a reward or a punishment as desirable, affects judgments made (2002). Within this process, vicarious motivators produce incentives for positive interactions and sanctions for transgressive behaviors. Bandura describes sanctions as being either social or internalized.

Posting content resulting in regret can fit within situational sanctions. In order to prevent transgressive behaviors, Bandura recommends self-regulatory actions. Applying this idea to social media use, a participant might observe the networked environment to understand the established norms displayed or post content similar to others' posts. Internally, a user might have a mental checklist for content approval, wait a minimum amount of time before posting in a hot state, or refrain from social media if in an altered state.

Bandura also includes self-reflective capability as a function of human communication competence whereby people can examine their own choices and

contributions to interactions for learning and modeling purposes (2002). Because regret is both an emotional and cognitive concept, full realization of regret can only be accomplished by using a self-reflective action, and may be prevented by using self-regulatory actions.

When asked how social media users realize regret resulting from posts, responses to RQ2 produced two emergent themes: internal awareness (like internal sanctions) and outside awareness (like social sanctions). Internal awareness of regret was demonstrated through cognitive mindfulness, emotional awareness, empathy, recognized feelings of decreased self-worth, recognized desire for outside validation, recognition of a change in status with the post subject, a resolution of the immediate hot emotional state, and acquisition of new information. Each of these internal indicators prompted respondents to realize a discord with behavior expected versus virtual behavior displayed.

Along with internal awareness needed to realize regret, respondents also recounted outside-of-self awareness. Comparable to social sanctions, contributors claimed they were made aware of a problem post through a variety of extrinsic means including: confrontation either directly face-to-face or through the social media post comments, receiving an undesirable punishment (like being suspended from school), or engaging in communication with the intended target of the social media post. In this way, most of the survey respondents shared that the social sanctions received from the regrettable post were undesirable.

In answer to RQ4 (What consequences stem from regrettable social media posts?) participants described both social and internalized sanctions as a consequence of the regrettable post. By describing consequences stemming from the regrettable posts,

responses were coded into the following themes: no consequence, negative association with self, negative association with others, and positive consequences. As a function of internal sanctions, social media users recalled feeling embarrassed, ashamed, disappointed, or feeling sorry for oneself. Social sanctions as consequences included being perceived differently by others, getting into trouble, disruption of relationships, creating a fight or argument, and being banned from a social media platform.

Conversely, some participants also claimed positive outcomes from social media regrettable experiences and they likewise apply to internal and social realms. Via personal reflection, one person expressed that the post made them feel temporarily better. Socially, some participants recounted an improvement in relationships or getting help with the problem that was the topic of the post. These instances describe favorable rewards as opposed to punishments as vicarious incentives. Although it is counterintuitive to acknowledge regret within a positive outcome, respondents generally acknowledged that the post content was improper or reflected poorly in some way. This description of a mixed result shows the complex nuances of social media use.

These various categories and themes offered by study participants contribute to Bandura's concept of self-regulatory and self-reflective capabilities in social cognitive theory. Without self-regulation, it is possible for mediated exchanges to result in scenarios that others within the social context consider improper or unacceptable, thereby leading to social sanctions. Bandura states that those propagating exchanges are agents of action. When social media users either do not practice self-regulation or they misinterpret social expectations modeled by others in the social media exchange, an undesirable outcome may occur. In order to be enlightened to the malfunction in communication,

people must also be self-examiners of their social functioning. In doing so, self-reflective competencies are exhibited and contribute to improvements in interactions. Survey participants, in describing their experiences of regret, affirm Bandura's idea of self-monitoring.

Adding to the idea of social cognitive theory, LaRose and Eastin posit that habit in mediated exchange is the dysfunction of one's ability to self-monitor (2004). They suggest that with repetition, one sets aside the cognitive function, or reason, to attend to other decision-making needs. Jordi Mir's experience, the impetus for this study, involved uploading to Facebook a video of a police officer being murdered by a terrorist because of reflex. He explained that the reflex was based on years of his habitual use of social media (ABQnews Staff, 2015).

Habitual social media use can be measured in one way by using frequency of interaction. RQ6 asked if there was a relationship in the frequency of social media use before and after experiencing regret. Answers to survey frequency categories revealed that after experiencing regret, the respondents reported a trend of decreased number of postings (Table 4) in the top three most frequent posting use categories and an increased number in the three least frequent posting categories. One possible reason for this is the user's dissatisfaction with the outcome evoked from the post. Studies show that frequent communication with others benefits overall mental health (Hampton, Goulet, Rainie, & Purcell, 2011). While a small number of respondents reported one positive result of their post, regret, by its nature, connotes a negative occurrence. Using social media with a higher rate of frequency may increase the opportunity to post regrettable content. Although frequency is not necessarily attributable to habitual use, it does offer one

possible explanation to social media regret. As demonstrated by the results from RQ6, incidents of regret appear to prompt users to post to social media less frequently after the experience. It is presumed that users modify use frequency to lower the possible chances of future regrettable experiences.

Ritual view of communication. Carey's ritual view of communication considers a different model of information sharing than the traditional transmission model. Where the transmission model typically is applied to mass media communication practices of messaging from sender to receiver, Carey's (1989/2009) ritual view takes into account the receiver's participation in the process with community. This practice is central to social media engagement. For example, RQ1 of the current study seeks to discover social media content topics resulting in regret. Findings show two main themes: association with self and association outside of self. Association with self includes categories such as personal matters, relationship matters, alcohol/drugs, profanity/obscenity, and school/team, while association outside of self includes political/policy issues, society, and cultural concerns.

Carey's ritual view of communication posits a model of people drawn together for the purpose of sharing, participation, association, and fellowship (1989/2009). Though some users report using social media to communicate about themselves, relationships, and other personal information, they also connect with their network by sharing observations or information dealing with issues outside of themselves. The ritual model claims that the process is less about the information conveyed, but more related to the act of sharing, receiving, and ingesting the information within community on a routine basis. Research by Van House et al. (2005) confirms that photo sharing is used to create and

maintain social relationships and Anderson (2011) agrees that information shared through a social media network includes a portrayal of the world.

The respondents corroborate Carey's view of ritual communication by describing a variety of topics that were freely presented to their social networks. Carey suggests that "news is not information but drama" (1989/2009, p. 7). Social media actors create events that shape personal and virtually networked relationships through the connectivity of the network itself, as well as the message content. Several participants reported sharing political, social and cultural information. The process of engaging with social media by individually constructing personal messaging can, however, diverge from Carey's idea of maintaining society and the representation of shared beliefs.

Through either internal awareness or outside awareness, RQ2 (How do social media users realize regret resulting from posts?) informed me that because the content creator's beliefs were not shared by some in their social media network, drama of an unexpected nature was created. Revealed in responses to RQ3 (For what reasons do social media users post regrettable content?), participants often engaged in the idea of fellowship for positive reasons (as Carey suggests), such as motivating others to have a favorable perception of the content creator or content. Alternatively, some participants freely admitted engaging in negative motivations (contrary to Carey's model), such as anger or depression.

While Carey envisioned the ritual view of communication as a way of drawing people together "to manifest an ongoing and fragile social process" (p. 5), instances of cognitive and emotional regret might tear networks apart. RQ4 (What consequences stem from regrettable social media posts?) responses highlight consequences from regrettable

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social media posts, including those associated with self and those associated with others. Within the social media user's own reflexivity, users reported embarrassment, shame, and feeling sorry for oneself. In association with others, there were a larger variety of consequences to deal with, including being perceived differently by others, getting into trouble, losing or altering a relationship, causing arguments, and being banned from social media. These negative consequences based on agentic actions seem to work against the core idea of the ritual view of communication. On the other hand, several users described positive outcomes resulting from a regrettable post, including a better relationship with a parent, strengthening a friendship, getting a response from a cry for help, and feeling temporarily better, which support the ritual model.

The data from RQ6 (Is there a relationship in the frequency of social media use before and after experiencing regret?) also substantiate that a routine of ritual communication may be established and altered depending on a potential negative experience. While is it not known if those who do not experience regret from using social media change their social media use over time, those who do experience a regrettable incident tended to change their frequency of use.

The significance of change in social media use before and after an incident of regret presented itself in two ways: the average posting frequencies based on ordinal measures, and a shift in frequencies of posts for each ordinal category. First, based on the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks T Test, a lower mean in ordinal rank of posting frequency *after* regret compared to the mean of ordinal rank *before* regret indicates that the sample population of mainly young adult college students post less often to social media after a regretful experience. There are a variety of speculative explanations for this including:

discontinued use of the social media app used during the incident of regret, self-censorship, a change in the usage of social media (e.g. more reading, less posting), or a change in available time to use social media. As one participant explained, "It made me realize once you post something it's forever" (P172).

A Chi-square test, corroborated by frequency statistics, signifies that the three ordinal categories measuring more frequent posting were selected less by survey participants after experiencing regret. whereas the three ordinal categories reporting less frequent use of the SNS were selected more frequently after experiencing an incident of regret. Additionally, there was a statistically significant change toward less frequent use overall.

Thus, participants reporting regret while engaging with social media appeared to change the routine previously set within their ritual use of the SNS. These discoveries suggest that even without cues or synchronous feedback afforded by face-to-face communication, mediated communication could also be adjusted based on users' regretful experiences.

These findings demonstrate that the ritual view of communication model is applicable to social media engagement. However, results suggest that when the message creator's content is posted for positive expression and social consensus occurs, the ritual view of communication of sharing information and values is more successful. However, messages posted with the intention of negative expressions may disrupt the ritual model. Regardless, due to the potential for miscommunication or misunderstanding among social media users, the ritual view of communication does not always prevail while using social media.

Study Limitations and Future Directions.

Several limitations must be considered when reviewing the findings of the present study. First, a convenience sample was used, thereby affecting the generalizability of the study. A component of random sample selection is typically needed to generalize findings to a larger target population.

Additionally, the convenience sample relied on mainly young adult college students, fostering a systemic bias. This bias presents the possibility that regrettable acts of commission may be due to the users' young age relative to an older adult population. On the other hand, it could be argued that a younger population has more experience with social media use than older adults. Although the majority of respondents in the current study are young adults, other college students fit within other age categories. Further study is suggested to understand the impact of age and social media experience in relation to regrettable posts.

Second, responses were gathered using a paper survey. This method of data collection did not give the opportunity for further investigation into the given answers. Depth interviews of select respondents could provide more detailed exploration of the topic. Next, several quantitative measures of data were collected that were not addressed in the current study. Further quantitative analysis may add to a wider understanding of the social media and regret usage phenomenon. Additionally, future studies that select one of the theories investigated in the current study in depth using the data collected could provide a more rich contribution to theory.

Conclusion

The purpose of the present study was to explore occurrences of users' engagement with social media resulting in regret. The findings of this study provide the opportunity to contribute a more detailed understanding of regrettable social media use. Findings show that users experience both hot and cold emotional states while posting. Therefore, the action regrets while using social media are due to both intense and measured acts of expression.

Users' reports of social media engagement corroborate Carey's ritual view of communication through acts of message sharing, participation, and fellowship within social networks. However, these mediated relationship threads can be disrupted by what users perceive to be harmful content. Users confirmed Goffman's idea of impression management by affirming that many people posted content that would make themselves look good. Conversely, some users posted content to make others look less favorable. In line with Bandura's social cognitive theory, the success of self-regulation and self-reflective capabilities helped to inform user awareness and may affect posting frequency.

It is important to note that a conflict exists between a ritual communication model that includes routine or automated posting frequency without introspection. This action can result in content shared in a participatory way with the users' socially networked community. However, once posted, the content creator and audience members, either immediately or over time, may review the message from a more critical perspective. Based on respondents' self-report of the methods of regret realization, readers of social media content might apply a different, more critical sensibility when experiencing or re-experiencing the posts. This is a fairly unique aspect of ritual communication because the content continues to be available for more critical, non-ritual, consideration.

The practical impact of these findings may help to inform social media users and educational training programs about the nuances of regrettable posting motivations and content.

Appendices

APPENDIX A: Study IRB Approval

UNM | Office of the Institutional Review Board

DATE: January 22, 2016

REFERENCE #: 20415
PROJECT TITLE: [834291-2] Social Media and Regret
PI OF RECORD: Richard Schaefer, Ph.D.
SUBMISSION TYPE: Response/Follow-Up

BOARD DECISION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT
EFFECTIVE DATE: January 21, 2016
REVIEW CATEGORY: Exempt category 2

DOCUMENTS:
- Advertisement - Recruitment Scripts (UPDATED: 01/7/2016)
- Application Form - Project Information (UPDATED: 01/7/2016)
- Consent Form - Consent Form paper survey (UPDATED: 01/7/2016)
- Consent Form - Consent Form online survey (UPDATED: 01/7/2016)
- Letter - Letter addressing modification requests (UPDATED: 01/7/2016)
- Protocol - Protocol (UPDATED: 01/7/2016)
- Questionnaire/Survey - Social Media and Regret Survey (UPDATED: 01/7/2016)
- CV/Resume - R Schaefer CV (UPDATED: 11/13/2015)
- Other - IRB Project Team (UPDATED: 12/4/2015)
- Other - Departmental Review (UPDATED: 11/13/2015)
- Training/Certification - Parks CITI (UPDATED: 12/4/2015)
- Training/Certification - CITI Schaefer (UPDATED: 11/30/2015)
- Training/Certification - CITI Oostman (UPDATED: 11/13/2015)

Thank you for your submission of Response/Follow-Up materials for this project. The University of New Mexico (UNM) IRB Main Campus has determined that this project is EXEMPT from IRB oversight according to federal regulations. Because it has been granted exemption, this research project is not subject to continuing review. It is the responsibility of the researcher(s) to conduct this project in an ethical manner.
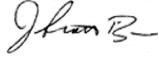
If Informed Consent is being obtained, use only approved consent document(s).

This determination applies only to the activities described in the submission and does not apply should any changes be made to this project. If changes are being considered, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to submit an amendment to this project for IRB review and receive IRB approval prior to implementing the changes. A change in the research may disqualify this research from the current review category.

The Office of the IRB can be contacted through: mail at MSC02 1665, 1 University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM 87131-0001; phone at 505.277.2644; email at irbmaincampus@unm.edu; or in-person at 1805 Sigma Chi Rd. NE, Albuquerque, NM 87106. You can also visit the OIRB website at irb.unm.edu.

- 1 -

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APPENDIX A: Study IRB Approval

Sincerely,

J. Scott Tonigan, PhD
IRB Chair

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APPENDIX B: Questionnaire

Social Media and Regret Questionnaire & Scenarios

Thank you for your time! The first set of questions is typical for research projects. Please answer them as completely as possible.

Demographics

1. Please indicate your gender: ____Male ____Female _____Other

2. Please indicate your age: _____years

3. What race do you most identify with? (*please circle)*
   Asian/Pacific Islander   Black/African American
   Hispanic/Latino/Latina   Native American
   White/Caucasian   If not listed please write here:
   Prefer not to answer
   _____

4. Are you an international student? _____Yes _____No
   • If yes please indicate your country of citizenship:
     _____

5. What year are you in college? *(choose one)*
   ☐ Freshman
   ☐ Sophomore
   ☐ Junior
   ☐ Senior or Super Senior
   ☐ Graduate or professional degree (Masters, Doctorate, etc.)
   ☐ Other (please specify):_____

6. What is your major? _____

The next section asks basic questions about your social media use.

For the following questions, the term "social media" means Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and similar apps.

Regarding social media and social networking sites in general, please answer the following:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Nthr Agree Nor Dsgr	Strngly Dis	Dis
7. Social networks are a great way for people to stay in touch with one another.	O	O	O	O	O
8. Social network sites are a waste of time.	O	O	O	O	O
9. Social networks allow people with similar interests to stay connected.	O	O	O	O	O
10. It consumes too much time to maintain and/or read social networking.	O	O	O	O	O
11. It is important for a person to have his or her own social networking in which they can tell about themselves and their activities.	O	O	O	O	O
12. I want to read about my friends and/or family members on their social network pages.	O	O	O	O	O
13. Potential and/or existing employers may use information found on social networking pages to make decisions about prospective and/or existing employees.	O	O	O	O	O
14. Social network sites are a great way to build online communities of people with shared interests or traits.	O	O	O	O	O
15. Social networking sites are just a fad.	O	O	O	O	O
16. I do not care what other people are doing.	O	O	O	O	O
17. The emergence of social networking sites illustrates a growing need among people for a sense of community.	O	O	O	O	O
18. A social network could be an effective communications tool in a college class.	O	O	O	O	O
19. Social networking sites have great potential for marketing businesses and/or individuals.	O	O	O	O	O

20. Do you currently use social media? *(choose one)*
- ⊙ Yes
- ⊙ No, but I used to use social media. If there was a time you regularly used social media, then continue the survey answering the questions applicable to that period of time.
- ⊙ No, I've never used social media. Skip to question 62.

21. How old were you when you first began using social media? _____

22. Which social media sites do you (or did you) have a <u>profile</u> or <u>account</u> with? *(please check all that apply)*
- ☐ Facebook
- ☐ Twitter
- ☐ Instagram
- ☐ Pinterest
- ☐ Snap Chat
- ☐ LinkedIn
- ☐ YouTube
- ☐ LinkedIn
- ☐ Tumblr
- ☐ Google +
- ☐ Other(s) _____

23. Of the choices in question 22, which site do you (or did you) use most?

    _____

For the next set of questions, apply them to your answer in question 23 – the social media you use the most.

24. Think of the reasons you use social media sites. For the site you use(d) the most, which of the following motivations represent reasons why you use(d) the site? (*please check all that apply*)
- ☐ Social interaction with others
- ☐ Information seeking (e.g. how-to, do-it-yourself information)
- ☐ Passing time when I am idle or bored
- ☐ Entertainment – I actively play games or seek funny videos
- ☐ Relaxation - when I'm stressed, want to escape, or take my mind off things
- ☐ Expression of my opinions of topics– through likes, posts or shares
- ☐ So I can have something to talk about with others – gossip, news or memes
- ☐ It's convenient – I can use it anytime or talk to many people at once
- ☐ Information sharing about myself – posts, photos, brand myself or my business
- ☐ Surveillance/knowledge about others – I like to look without someone knowing I am

25. In question 23 above – for the site you use(d) most, which of the following motivations is **the ONE most important** reason you use (or used) the site? (*please **check only ONE**)*
- ⭘ Social interaction with others
- ⭘ Information seeking (e.g. how-to, do-it-yourself information)
- ⭘ Passing time when I am idle or bored
- ⭘ Entertainment – I actively play games or seek funny videos
- ⭘ Relaxation - when I'm stressed, want to escape or take my mind of things
- ⭘ Expression of my opinions of topics– through likes, posts or shares
- ⭘ So I can have something to talk about with others – gossip, news or memes
- ⭘ It's convenient – I can use it anytime or talk to many people at once
- ⭘ Information sharing about myself – posts, photos, brand myself or my business
- ⭘ Surveillance/knowledge about others – I like to look without someone knowing I am

26. How often do you (or did you) post on social media sites? (*choose one*)
- ⭘ Multiple times a day
- ⭘ Once daily
- ⭘ A few times a week
- ⭘ A few times a month
- ⭘ Less than once a month
- ⭘ Never

27. Of all the social media sites you listed in number 22 above, how often do you (or did you) perform the following *(select rating for each option)*:

	Many times per day	Once daily	A few times a week	A few times a month	Less than once a month	Never
Share photos you have taken	⭘	⭘	⭘	⭘	⭘	⭘
Share videos you have created	⭘	⭘	⭘	⭘	⭘	⭘
Share video you find online (e.g. YouTube)	⭘	⭘	⭘	⭘	⭘	⭘
Share someone's post (e.g. status, Tweet)	⭘	⭘	⭘	⭘	⭘	⭘
Write a post	⭘	⭘	⭘	⭘	⭘	⭘
Read a blog	⭘	⭘	⭘	⭘	⭘	⭘
Write a blog	⭘	⭘	⭘	⭘	⭘	⭘
Read news articles	⭘	⭘	⭘	⭘	⭘	⭘
Share news articles	⭘	⭘	⭘	⭘	⭘	⭘
Read entertainment articles	⭘	⭘	⭘	⭘	⭘	⭘
Share entertainment articles	⭘	⭘	⭘	⭘	⭘	⭘
Read celebrity news	⭘	⭘	⭘	⭘	⭘	⭘
Share celebrity news	⭘	⭘	⭘	⭘	⭘	⭘

Create other content
(e.g. meme, etc.)   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○
Other (*please specify*) _____○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

28. What types of **comments** (words) do you (or did you) post on your profiles?
(*select rating for each option*)

	Many times per day	Once daily	A few times a week	A few times a month	Less than once a month	Never
Observations about my daily life	○	○	○	○	○	○
Comments with friends/ family seen almost daily	○	○	○	○	○	○
Comments with friends/ family I see less often	○	○	○	○	○	○
Posts to groups I am a member of	○	○	○	○	○	○
Comments about national issues	○	○	○	○	○	○
Comments about local issues	○	○	○	○	○	○
Comments about international issues	○	○	○	○	○	○
Posts to fan sites	○	○	○	○	○	○
Other (*please specify*)	○	○	○	○	○	○

29. What types of **visuals** (photos, videos, memes, etc.) do you (or did you) post on your profiles? (*select rating for each option*)

	Many times per day	Once daily	A few times a week	A few times a month	Less than once a month	Never
Observations about my daily life	○	○	○	○	○	○
Visuals of friends/family seen almost daily	○	○	○	○	○	○
Visuals of friends/family I see less often	○	○	○	○	○	○
Posts to groups I am a member of	○	○	○	○	○	○
Visuals about national issues	○	○	○	○	○	○
Visuals about local issues	○	○	○	○	○	○
Visuals about international issues	○	○	○	○	○	○
Posts to fan sites	○	○	○	○	○	○
Other (*please specify*)	○	○	○	○	○	○

30. When you use (or used) social media to communicate to someone, generally is it more important to you to take receivers' feelings into consideration in the way you word the content, or is it more important to say what you want to say? (*circle one*)

Take feelings
        into consideration   1   2   3   4   5   Say what I want to say

31. Think about the people in your social media networks. What kind of relationship do you (or did you) have with **the majority** of your contacts? (*choose one*)
    - ○   We have never met, or just met.
    - ○   We don't know each well and only talk about public info like the news or weather.
    - ○   We talk about personal information (family and work).
    - ○   We talk about personal and private information.
    - ○   We know almost everything about each other.

32. Have you ever posted something (words, a photo, a video, something you shared, etc.) you later regreted?
    - ○   Yes
    - ○   No – If not, please skip to question 62.

The next section of this survey will ask you to share experiences you may have had using social media.

Posting That You Regretted

Think about a post on social media that you later **regretted** posting. Then answer the following questions.

33. Which social media app did you use? *(choose one)*
    - ○   Facebook
    - ○   Twitter
    - ○   Instagram
    - ○   Pinterest
    - ○   Snap Chat
    - ○   LinkedIn
    - ○   YouTube
    - ○   LinkedIn
    - ○   Tumblr
    - ○   Google +
    - ○   Other(s) _____

34. At the time that you MADE the post (which you later regretted), which of the following motivations was **the ONE most important** reason you were using the site? (*please **check only ONE***)

- Social interaction with others
- Information seeking (e.g. how-to, do-it-yourself information)
- Passing time when I am idle or bored
- Entertainment – I actively play games or seek funny videos
- Relaxation - when I'm stressed, want to escape or take my mind of things
- Expression of my opinions of topics– through likes, posts or shares
- So I can have something to talk about with others – gossip, news or memes
- It's convenient – I can use it anytime or talk to many people at once
- Information sharing about myself – posts, photos, brand myself or my business
- Surveillance/knowledge about others – I like to look without someone knowing I am

35. Think about your level of awareness when you posted. Were you (*choose only one*):
- Tired
- Thinking about something else or distracted by other people
- Fully aware
- Under the influence of alcohol or controlled substance
- Other _____

36. **Previous** to this particular post, how often did you routinely post on this social media site? *(choose one)*
- Many times a day
- Once daily
- A few times a week
- A few times a month
- Less than once a month
- Never

37. How long ago did you make the post you regretted?

38. What was the topic of your post? What did you say? (If you remember the exact words, put them in quotes; describe the picture or content).

39. Who was the post about? What is your relationship with him/her/them?

40. How did you feel when you wrote the post (e.g. depressed, angry, neutral, excited, happy, etc.)?

41. How do you think the other person/people reading the post felt?

42. How was the post perceived (e.g. Was it perceived as overly critical, racist, revealing too much information, etc.)? How do you know?

43. How long did it take before you regretted posting it (e.g. within 1 minute after posting it, within 10 minutes, within 1 hour…etc.)?

44. How did you come to realize you regretted the post?

45. Did you have any concerns about your post before you posted it? If so, what were your concerns? Why did you decide to post it anyway?

46. What reasons best explain why you posted it (e.g. I thought it was useful, would make me look good, I was angry, etc.)?

47. What happened as a result of the post (e.g. I got fired, I lost a friendship, I was embarrassed, etc.)?

48. Did you take any action to change or delete the post? If yes, how did you feel after taking that action?

Regarding your decision to make the post, please answer the following:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Nthr Agree Nor Dsgr	Dis	Strngly Dis
49. It was the right decision	O	O	O	O	O
50. I regret the choice that					
51. was made	O	O	O	O	O
52. I would go for the same choice if I had to do it over again	O	O	O	O	O
53. The choice did me a lot of harm	O	O	O	O	O
54. The decision was a wise one	O	O	O	O	O

55. How much did you regret making that post? *(choose one)*
   O   Deeply regret
   O   Somewhat regret
   O   Only a little regret

56. Why do you regret making that post?

57. Was your post viewed by people you didn't realize would see it? If so, who were the people you didn't realize would see that post?

58. How did this event affect your use of **this particular** social media site, if at all?

59. **After** this particular post, how often did you routinely create posts on this social media site? *(choose one)*
   O   Many times a day
   O   Once daily
   O   A few times a week
   O   A few times a month
   O   Less than once a month
   O   Never

60. In the last 12 months, how many times have you regretted posting something on social media?

61. Ideally, if you were given the chance to re-do your post, what would you want to do (leave as is, change the wording, restrict viewing)?

62. How, if at all, did this event affect the way you use social media in general?

63. a). If you have never used social media, please explain why:

    b). If you currently don't use social media at all, please explain why:

64. Is there anything else you'd like to share:

65. If further research is performed regarding this topic, would you want to be interviewed about your social media regret experience? If yes, please write your name and email address.

Thank you for taking part in the survey. I appreciate your time and am grateful for your help!
~ Kimm Oostman

Social Media and Regret Survey Support

Dear Participant,

If you have questions regarding your legal rights as a research subject, you may call the UNM Office of the IRB (OIRB) at (505) 277-2644.

If you have questions regarding this particular study, or you would like to receive an email notification when this thesis project is accessible through UNM's LoboVault, please send your question or request to Kimm Oostman at kroostman@unm.edu.

If, as a result of completing this survey, you'd like emotional support, you may contact UNM's AGORA Crisis Center at 505-277-3013 or http://www.unm.edu/~agora/.

Thank you for your contribution!

Kimm Oostman
Student investigator

APPENDIX C: **Recruitment and Thank You Scripts**

Recruitment Email to Instructors

Email Subject: Requesting your Permission: A Research Opportunity for your Students

Dear [Instructor's Name],

For my Master's thesis I am examining college students' uses of social media and experiences of regret while using social media. I would like to invite your students to participate in this study. Findings from this study will greatly improve our understanding of students' social media routines, decision making, and reflections of regretful situations as well as their outcomes.

Participation consists of voluntarily completing a take-home paper survey that I can distribute in the classroom or a secure online questionnaire. If your students agree to participate they will answer demographic questions and questions about how they use and choose social media platforms. The survey will also include open-ended questions where they can explain some of their experiences with using social media. The entire survey will take approximately 20 minutes. All participants in this study must be 18 years or older. All responses will be anonymous.

In an effort to recruit research participants, would you be willing to let me invite students to participate in one of your classes or share my online questionnaire with your students to gain their participation? Perhaps you would consider giving some bonus points to participants, as well as an alternative assignment for bonus points to those who do not want to complete the survey.

For the take-home paper survey, I will arrange a second date with you to collect the surveys, separating the student names for you to award bonus points. The online survey will request student and instructor names so I can provide you with a list of participants for bonus points once the survey is closed. Participant names are not attached with the data-collecting portion of the survey. You are welcome to share the following recruitment email about the study and the included SurveyMonkey link.

[Enter survey link here]

The results of this questionnaire will be analyzed in my Master's thesis. If you have any questions or concerns please email me at kroostman@unm.edu. Alternatively, please feel free to contact my responsible faculty, Dr. Richard Schaefer at Schaefer@unm.edu.

Sincerely,
Kimm Oostman

Classroom Recruitment Script

Hi, my name is Kimm Oostman and I am a Master's student here at UNM in the Department of Communication and Journalism. For my Master's thesis I am examining college students' uses of social media and experiences of regret while using social media. I would like to invite you to participate in this study. Findings from this study will greatly improve our understanding of students' social media routines, decision making, and reflections of regretful situations as well as their outcomes.

Participation consists of voluntarily completing a questionnaire. If you agree to participate you will answer demographic questions and questions about how you use and choose social media platforms. The survey will also include open-ended questions where you can explain some of your experiences with using social media. The entire survey will take approximately 20 minutes.

The results of this questionnaire will be analyzed in my Master's thesis.

All participants in this study must be 18 years or older. All responses will be anonymous. [Pass out surveys to everyone in attendance.] To participate, please take this survey home, complete it as best you can, and bring it back to class on [appointed date]. This survey is completely voluntary, you can stop taking the survey or skip answering questions if you choose. If you choose to participate in the study, just fill it out and I'll be back in class to pick them up on [appointed date].

If you have any questions or would like additional information about this study, my name and email address are on the survey.

I am sincerely thankful for both your time and consideration.

Email sent from Instructor to Students

Email Subject: Research Invitation to Students

Dear UNM Student,

For my Master's thesis I am examining college students' uses of social media and experiences of regret while using social media. I would like to invite you to participate in this study. Findings from this study will greatly improve our understanding of students' social media routines, decision making, and reflections of regretful situations as well as their outcomes.

Participation consists of voluntarily completing a secure online questionnaire. If you agree to participate you will answer demographic questions and questions about how you use and choose social media platforms. The survey will also include open-ended questions where you can explain some of your experiences with using social media. The entire survey will take approximately 20 minutes.

The results of this questionnaire will be analyzed in my Master's thesis.

All participants in this study must be 18 years or older. All responses will be anonymous. To participate, please click the following link:

[Enter survey link here]

If you have any questions or would like additional information about this study, please contact Kimm Oostman at kroostman@unm.edu.

I am sincerely thankful for both your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Kimm Oostman

Thank You/Reminder Email

Email Subject: Thank you for your participation!

Dear UNM Graduate Student,

Two weeks ago I sent you an email invitation to participate in my study about college students' uses of social media and experiences of regret while using social media.

If you have already completed the questionnaire, please accept my sincere thanks! Your help in this study is greatly appreciated. If not, I encourage you to take a few minutes to respond to this survey. Please click on the link below to respond to the survey. The entire survey will take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

[Enter survey link here]

Additionally, please remember that all participants in this study must be 18 years or older. All responses are anonymous.

Thank you again for both your time and valuable input. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this survey please do not hesitate to contact me at kroostman@unm.edu.

Sincerely,
Kimm Oostman

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