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Consumers' Representations of Social Media

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Abstract

Social media is transforming the lives of consumers. The phenomenon is new and evolving rapidly. Social media is now a crucial step in the growth of many companies, and managers increasingly need guidance (Evans, 2012; Hafeez Anjum, 2010; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Over the last years, social media has been studied with surveys, blogs, executive reports, and some academic papers. We first explored researchers' different definitions of social media in order to get a better basic understanding of the concept. In an attempt to grasp information about consumers' experience with social media, we then presented specific findings on goals, feelings, and behaviors associated with social media. A large part of previous research focused on social networking sites, one component of social media. In addition, a lot of information was quantitative. As a result of our literature review, we noticed that the most fundamental step has been omitted: we still don't know what really matters to consumers when considering social media as a whole, and we don't have a holistic understanding of their perceptions. The objective of this thesis is to dig deeper into consumers' experiences with social media through a full exploration, and understand: What does social media represent to consumers?

Using the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET) (Zaltman, 1998), we conducted in-depth interviews with ten consumers of social media. We presented our findings in the structure of a three by three matrix which combined the elicited metaphors of connection, control, and resource with dimensional themes of the human experience: space, time, and speed.

Findings suggested that the space and the speed of social media were favorable to building connections. Social media being a space favorable to a high exposure of personal information, consumers felt that their connections with others were deepened. However, some informants reported feeling disconnected because of social media. Social media has a new omnipresence in consumers' lives as it is increasingly accessed by mobile phones. Due to their large amount of time and effort required, some platforms of social media were perceived as unrewarding for goal of connecting. Moreover, consumers reported their will to exert and feel in control on the space of social media. Some mentioned ability to control situations with acquired discipline and effort, while others described it to be a challenge. Informants wished to be in control over their privacy and image on social media due to personal reasons. Consumers lacked control over the immensity

of information present on the social media space, and their learning process of social media due to the fast pace of the evolution of social media. Age and interest were factors influencing the learning of social media. Some consumers disciplined themselves as they perceived their time to be wasted or well-spent on social media. Finally, the social media space (most frequently accessed by mobile phones) was perceived as a resource for the everyday life of consumers. Thanks to the potential massive reach to people, the social media space was seen as the perfect place to grasp important business contacts and promote personal ideas or business. It also represented individual empowerment through self-expression and enrichment. Social media was shown to have great time saving qualities thanks to its useful convenience and its fast pace, and was seen as a resource for instantaneous information.

This research allowed us to grasp deep individual insights on how social media is perceived by consumers and what it represents in their lives nowadays. The result is a fundamental thorough view of what social media represents and symbolizes to consumers, which was lacking from literature. This fundamental knowledge can benefit managers of all fields in better understanding how to target customers on social media, and how to optimize their online experience. Creators of phone applications can learn how to adapt applications to the needs and wants of consumers. We concluded the thesis with the limits of our research, and potential avenues for future research.

Key words: Social media, Social Networks, Consumers, Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique, ZMET, Perceptions, Metaphors, Representations

Sommaire

Les médias sociaux sont en train de transformer la vie des consommateurs. Ce nouveau phénomène est en pleine et rapide évolution. De nos jours, les médias sociaux représentent une étape fondamentale pour le succès de nombreuses entreprises. Les gestionnaires ont de plus en plus besoin d'aide et de conseils (Evans, 2012; Hafeez Anjum, 2010; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Au cours des dernières années, les recherches portant sur les médias sociaux venaient sous forme d'enquêtes, de blogs, de rapports de gestion, et de recherches académiques. En premier lieu, nous avons retenu les différentes définitions des médias sociaux selon les chercheurs afin d'obtenir une meilleure compréhension de base du concept. Ensuite, nous avons tenté d'examiner l'expérience des consommateurs avec les médias sociaux en présentant des données puisées dans la littérature sur les objectifs, les sentiments et les comportements des consommateurs en relation avec les médias sociaux. La majorité des recherches précédentes portait sur les réseaux sociaux, une des composantes des médias sociaux. En outre, les informations trouvées étaient souvent sous la forme de données quantitatives.

À la suite de notre revue de littérature, nous avons observé qu'il manquait une étape fondamentale: nous ne savons toujours pas ce qui importe vraiment aux consommateurs pour ce qui est des médias sociaux dans leur ensemble, et nous n'avons pas une compréhension globale de leurs perceptions des médias sociaux. Ainsi, l'objectif de cette thèse consiste à analyser l'expérience des consommateurs avec les médias sociaux par le biais d'une profonde analyse afin de comprendre que représentent les médias sociaux pour les consommateurs? En employant la méthode de recherche du professeur Zaltman nommée « the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique » ou « ZMET » (Zaltman, 1998), nous avons mené des entrevues en profondeur avec dix consommateurs de médias sociaux. Nous avons présenté nos résultats sous la forme d'une matrice selon laquelle nous avons joint les métaphores émergeantes de la connexion, du contrôle, et de la ressource, avec trois dimensions caractéristiques de l'expérience humaine: l'espace, le temps et la vitesse.

Les résultats indiquent que l'espace et la vitesse des médias sociaux sont favorables à la formation de liens entre les individus. Comme les médias sociaux représentent un espace propice à la divulgation d'informations personnelles, les consommateurs estiment que leurs relations avec les

autres tendent à s'approfondir. Toutefois, certains informateurs se sentaient déconnectés des autres. Les médias sociaux sont devenus omniprésents dans la vie des consommateurs grâce à leur accessibilité amplifiée par les téléphones mobiles. Certaines plates-formes de médias sociaux sont perçues comme étant inefficaces en raison des efforts et du temps requis pour les administrer dans le but de former des liens avec des proches.

En outre, les consommateurs ont exprimé une volonté d'avoir le contrôle sur l'espace des médias sociaux. Grâce à leur propre discipline et efforts, certains ont mentionné leur habileté à contrôler certaines situations auxquelles ils font face sur les médias sociaux, tandis que d'autres l'ont décrit comme étant un défi. Les informateurs souhaitent contrôler leur vie privée et leur image en ligne pour des raisons personnelles. Ils ont mentionné une perte de contrôle due à l'immensité d'informations présentes sur l'espace des médias sociaux, et à leurs processus d'apprentissage des médias sociaux en raison du rythme intense et rapide de l'évolution de ces derniers. L'âge et l'intérêt des consommateurs semblent influencer leur apprentissage des médias sociaux. Certains participants ont mentionné leur discipline en relation avec le temps qu'ils percevaient perdre ou au contraire utiliser efficacement sur les médias sociaux. Enfin, l'espace des médias sociaux (le plus souvent consulté par les téléphones mobiles) a été perçu comme étant une ressource dans la vie quotidienne des consommateurs. Le fait de pouvoir atteindre un immense nombre de personnes sur les médias sociaux en fait un espace idéal pour saisir des contacts d'affaires ou pour promouvoir des idées personnelles. L'espace des médias sociaux favorise et permet la liberté d'expression et l'enrichissement personnel des individus. Les médias sociaux représentent aussi un espace pratique aidant les consommateurs à gagner du temps et à faire les choses facilement et rapidement. C'est une grande ressource d'information instantanée.

Cette recherche nous a permis de saisir de profondes connaissances sur la façon dont les médias sociaux sont perçus par les consommateurs et ce qu'ils représentent dans leurs vies. Le résultat est une vision approfondie de ce que les médias sociaux représentent et symbolisent pour les consommateurs, qui était absente de la littérature. Cette connaissance fondamentale peut bénéficier des gestionnaires de tous les domaines en leur offrant une meilleure compréhension de la manière de cibler leurs clients sur les médias sociaux et d'optimiser leurs expériences en ligne. Les inventeurs de logiciels et d'applications pour les téléphones mobiles pourront apprendre à adapter leurs produits selon les véritables besoins et désirs des consommateurs. En conclusion,

nous mentionnons les limites de notre recherche, et des éventuelles avenues de recherches futures.

Mots clés: Médias sociaux, Réseaux sociaux, Consommateurs, Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique, ZMET, Perceptions, Métaphores, Représentations

Table of Contents

Table of Figures

List of Tables

List of Images

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Introduction

Over the last few years, social media has been studied under different perspectives. Research is in the form of consumer surveys, blogs, executive reports, and some academic papers. Studies involving consumers of social media have touched topics such as understanding consumers' views of social networking sites, one prevalent component of social media ("The Story of Social Networking: A Timeless Catch-22," 2009). As well, specific knowledge was studied such as motives to engage in social media (Teichert, Bressette, & Wagenfuehrer, 2011), different degrees of usage of social networks (Hargittai & Hsieh, 2010), the relationship between personality traits and social media use (Özgüven & Mucan, 2013), and the purchasing processes involving social media for specific activities such as travelling (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). On the other hand, many researchers have focused on clarifying the phenomenon of social media to aid management. Social media is now a new crucial step in the growth of any company, and managers increasingly need guidance (Evans, 2012; Hafeez Anjum, 2010; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Entire websites such as Mashable.com are dedicated to presenting knowledge about the phenomenon to keep up with its evolution.

While we have read about social networking sites, consumers' motivations, and purchasing processes involving social media, the most basic step has been omitted: we still don't know how consumers understand the concept of social media. We still don't grasp what really matters to consumers when considering every aspect of social media. As individuals' perceptions about social media have not been studied holistically, we don't have the big picture regarding their insights. We can thus formulate our research question as follows: *What does social media really represent to consumers?* The purpose of this thesis is to dig deeper into consumers' experiences with social media so that research can further advance its understanding of the revolutionizing and consuming phenomenon. By conducting in-depth interviews with consumers, this research will allow a thorough fundamental exploration of social media, how it is perceived by consumers, and what it involves in a person's life.

This work will benefit numerous parties. Deep individual insights on the topic of social media will allow managers to learn how to target customers in the best ways on social media. Amongst others, social media companies and retail organizations will grasp what consumers are looking for during their experience on social media. Marketers will learn to optimize the online experience of consumers. A qualitative exploration will help to identify important concepts related to social media. Knowledge on the fundamental consumer perceptions of social media will be essential to make way for future research. For instance, quantitative research may be done involving more specific topics to further confirm results on a larger scale of consumers.

The thesis is divided into four sections. The first chapter will expose the existing literature on social media including the multiple definitions of the concept, and the goals, feelings, and behaviors of consumers associated with social media. This review of the literature will allow us to get a first elementary picture of the meaning of social media in consumers' lives. The second chapter will present the methodology of this research. We will describe the selected research method: the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique or ZMET. Moreover, the third chapter will present and analyze the results of ten qualitative in-depth interviews with consumers of social media. These findings will then be put in relation with the previous literature in the following chapter of the discussion. Finally, we will conclude the thesis with highlights of contribution to academic literature and to management, the limits of the research, and potential avenues of future research.

Chapter 1 Literature Review

1.1. Introduction

This thesis seeks to uncover the deep representations of social media by consumers to better understand their experience with the phenomenon. When analyzing the representations of a concept, we are searching for meanings, expressions, or symbols. For instance, we are looking for the signification of social media to a person. We may wonder, what does social media "stand for", "denote", or "embody" for this individual? (Dictionary.com; Oxforddictionaries.com). To our knowledge, the deep meanings of social media for consumers have not been studied in previous literature. However, research has concentrated on specific entities and features of social media which can help us grasp some information about the phenomenon. For instance, we may find data concerning consumers' goals, feelings, and behaviors in relation to social media. Combining such pieces of knowledge together may enrich us in relation to our research question: What does social media represent to consumers?

The following literature review aims at clarifying the phenomenon of social media. The chapter is divided in two sections which yield information about social media in a complementary way. In the first section, we look at what research can tell us about the topic of social media. As we gather researchers' definitions of social media, we attempt to clarify the notion in a first basic manner. In the second section, we move further and focus on finding information on the meaning and significance of social media to consumers as we present data on consumers' goals, feelings and behaviors associated with social media.

1.2. Defining Social Media

The purpose of this section of the literature review is to clarify the main concept of this thesis: social media. In order to do so, we will first present the existing definitions of the phenomenon in literature. Later, we will highlight the differences between the entities of social networks and social media. Finally, we will compare social media with traditional media.

1.2.1. Multiple Definitions of Social Media

Researchers have addressed the fact that there is a lack of understanding of the concept of social media and it necessitates further research (H. Cohen, 2011; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011; Scott, 2007). Managers are not clear about the distinctions of various kinds of social media, and don't know how to get involved (Kietzmann et al., 2011). The definition of social media remains ambiguous and unclear (Brunty & Helenek, 2012).

Social media is evolving at the intense growth rate of technology (H. Cohen, 2011). Because of this rapid growth, the definition of social media is constantly changing and evolving (H. Cohen, 2011). While social media has been pervasive in recent research, we nonetheless notice multiple different definitions of the phenomenon. Cohen (2011) presents thirty definitions of social media from a survey done with active participants. We notice how each definition is specific to its kind.

By skimming through the literature, we notice how definitions of social media have evolved throughout the years. Blackshaw and Nazzaro (2004) described consumer-generated media as a "variety of new sources of online information that are created, initiated, circulated and used by consumers intent on educating each other about products, brands, services, personalities, and issues'' (p. 2). From this definition, social media seems to have a certain educative goal. In 2007, researchers noted how websites dedicated to simple sharing of media began to take in aspects specific to social networking sites. These aspects included the construction of a public profile, the sharing of connections with others, and the view of the list of connections (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). We realize how, in the period of three years, the concept of social media had progressed. Three years later, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), in an attempt to clarify the phenomenon to marketers, identified two crucial concepts related to social media. First, the Web 2.0 represents the collaborative and dynamic platform on which social media exists since the year 2004, and second, the content which comes in different forms and is called User-Generated Content (UGC). For further clarification, Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) relied on theories of media research and social processes to classify different types of social media. The researchers distinguished six categories of social media according to their degrees of social presence, media richness, self-presentation, and self-disclosure: collaborative projects, blogs, content communities, social networking sites, virtual game worlds, and virtual social worlds (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Social media was no longer a

simple place for building connection. The phenomenon was growing and new aspects and features were becoming part of its definition.

As years went by, we noticed other additions to the concept of social media. In their extensive list of social media platforms, Mangold and Faulds (2009) included company sponsored discussion boards and chat rooms, e-mails, shopping sites like Amazon.com or Craig's List, podcasts, news delivery sites, educational materials sharing, open source software communities, and social bookmarking sites like Reddit.

In 2010, researchers included new trends in their definitions of social media such as the location and mobile trend by the use of applications like Foursquare, as well as the group-buying trend through Groupon, and the social commerce trend (Anonymous, 2011). As social media was growing, it was starting to impact consumers' behaviors online as well as offline. Miller (2012) addressed the fact that social media was highly influencing shopping behavior. Consumers were increasingly following retailers on social media and purchasing from social sites (Miller, 2012).

Heinonen (2011) focused on the idea that content on social media is created by users. The researcher included services such as blogs, reviews and rating sites, social networking sites and online communities in her definition of social media (Heinonen, 2011). In her paper, she described different applications of social media and their functional purposes. For instance, collaborative projects or wikis enabled individuals to contribute and create content collectively. Online publications or blogs allowed personal writing and conversation with people. As well, content communities such as YouTube, Flickr, and Dopplr allowed the sharing of a particular type of content. Social networking sites allowed users to build relationships and network together. In addition, entertainment-oriented social worlds and virtual game worlds like Second Life allowed users to build virtual realities in which they could exist. Finally, multi-player games like World of Warcraft created interaction and communication (Heinonen, 2011). Thus, according to Heinonen (2011), social media comprised the following functionalities: creating, contributing, personal writing, sharing, building relationships, and communicating. Similarly, Kietzmann et al. (2011) attempted to clarify social media by using a framework of seven functional blocks: identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups. The researchers sought to teach managers how to engage in different platforms of social media (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Moreover, Brunty and Helenek (2012) described social media as a concept which encouraged

communication between individuals with similar interests. Sharing, connecting, and developing a sense of community represented key aspects of social media, according to the authors (Brunty & Helenek, 2012).

As we presented numerous definitions of social media, we notice how the concept characterises different things to researchers, and the extent to which, social media has been evolving with new components over the years. Some say that "social media is in the eye of the beholder" (Dysart, 2011, p. A14). As the phenomenon might vary for different individuals and organizations due to its complexity, it is increasingly essential to clarify visions and perceptions of the concept to assure that everyone works towards the same goals (Dysart, 2011). The following Table 1 shows the different definitions of social media and their key concepts from the literature, and their evolution throughout the years.

Table 1 Definitions of Social Media and Key Concepts from Literature

Definitions of Social Media	Key Concepts
"[…] variety of new sources of online information that are created, initiated, circulated and used by consumers intent on educating each other about products, brands, services, personalities, and issues'' (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2004, p. 2)	• Content creation and circulation • Education about products, services
"[…] my blog can be updated for all readers nearly instantly […] You can interact with my blog. You can leave a comment.[…] you can get some sense of the popularity of my stuff in real time. How many comments does each post get? How many links does each post get? […] Here on my blog I can mix media. A post could contain text, audio, video, or photos. Not so on newspaper or magazines." (Scoble, 2007)	• Dynamic content • Immediate feedback, comments, ratings • Possibility of mixed content (audio, text, video, image).
"Social media encompasses a wide range of online, word-of-mouth forums including blogs, company sponsored discussion boards and chat rooms, consumer-to-consumer e-mail, consumer product or service ratings websites and forums, Internet discussion boards and forums, moblogs (sites containing digital audio, images, movies, or photographs), and social networking websites, to name a few." (Mangold & Faulds, 2009, p. 358)	• Consumer to consumer email • Product rating sites • Discussion boards • Visuals, audio, video
"[…] social technologies have enabled a revolution in user-generated content, global community and the publishing of consumer opinion, now uniformly tagged as social media […] the leading social platforms like Facebook, MySpace, YouTube and now Twitter […] are the tip of a redefinition of how the internet works, with every site now incorporating the features that allow users to publish opinions, connect, build community, or produce and share content." (Smith, 2009, p. 559)	• Publish opinions • Connect • Build community • Produce and share content

"Social Media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content […] we rely on a set of theories in the field of media research (social presence, media richness) and social processes (self-presentation, self-disclosure), the two key elements of Social Media". (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61)	• Social Presence • Media Richness • Self-Presentation • Self-Disclosure
"The term social media here refers to user-created services, such as blogs, online review/rating sites, social networking sites, and online communities. […] we categorize collaborative projects and blogs as content creation and publishing tools. Collaborative projects or wikis are websites that allow people to contribute or edit content in a collective way. […] Social networking sites enable users to create and maintain a community of individuals. Virtual game worlds and social worlds, such as Second Life or World of Warcraft, are more entertainment oriented and enable consumers to enter a virtual or other reality". (Heinonen, 2011, p. 356-357)	• Collective creation of content • Entry into a virtual reality
"Another trend for social media that started in 2010 that will continue in 2011 is location and mobile, led by platforms including Foursquare and Facebook's Places and Deals. […] Social media doesn't start and end online, however. […] Social experiences extend beyond the web and, as brands start to see social as one strategy across multiple platforms, we'll see further disruption of mobile and brands, closing the loop between offline and online. […] A final trend will be social commerce as group— buying sites such as Groupon continue to grow" (Anonymous, 2011, p. 1-2)	• Location and mobile trend • Social commerce trend
"Social media employ mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms via which individuals and communities share, create, discuss, and modify user-generated content. […] we present a framework that defines social media by using seven functional building blocks: identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups." (Kietzmann et al., 2011, p.241)	• Interactivity • Identity • Conversation • Sharing • Presence • Relationships • Reputation • Groups
"[…] social media empower individuals to create, share and seek content, as well as to communicate and collaborate with each other." (Lee & Ma, 2012, p. 332)	• Consumer empowerment
"A social medium allows the user to create a profile within the site […] once users have created a unique profile, they may find and connect with other members on the site. […] A social medium encourages its users to communicate with other users who are part of that network and/or connect through their similar interests. […] One of the goals of a social medium is a sense of community among users." (Brunty & Heleneck, 2012, p. 1-2)	• Creation of a profile • Communication • Connection • Similar interests • Sense of community

According to the multiple definitions from literature, we may now establish a synthesis definition of social media. We thus formulate the synthesis definition of social media as follows: a set of media by which different types of content (information, feedback, ratings, etc.) are diffused in the form of text, visuals audio, or video, are produced by users, and are worked in accordance with specific characteristics (instantaneity, adaptability, unicity) to fulfill different purposes

(communication, building of communities, producing, sharing, etc.). We have opted to organize this synthesis definition and its key elements into four categories: different types of content, vehicles of content, characteristics, and purpose, shown in Table 2 below:

Table 2 Synthesis Definition of Social media

Social Media			
Types of Content	**Content Vehicle**	**Characteristics**	**Purpose**
• Information • Feedback • Ratings • Opinions • Exposure of personal information	• Text • Visuals (imagery, photos) • Audio • Video	• User-created • Instantaneous • Adaptable • Unique	• Communication • Interaction • Building of community • Sharing • Producing • Building of reputation • Entry into a reality/virtual world

1.2.2. Social Networks vs. Social Media

When studying social media, academic researchers have largely focused on social networking sites (Boyd & Ellison, 2007), the most popular component of social media. In existing research, we have noticed how the terms social networks and social media have frequently been used interchangeably. However, using the two expressions in such a manner is erroneous as they represent distinctive concepts and engage consumers in different ways. Social networks are defined as "web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (Boyd & Ellisson, 2007, p. 211). As shown in the previous section of the literature on definitions of social media, the aspect of connection and building of relationships is solely one of the numerous elements included in the broader spectrum of social media. For instance, users of social media have the opportunity to "create content" (Oxforddictionaries.com), an element that is not key to the concept of social networking sites. In addition, on social networking sites, users expose

personal information about themselves with the purpose of communicating with their friends (Slovensky & Ross, 2012). Social media entities such as blogs, company sponsored discussion boards, and consumer product or service ratings websites and forums (Mangold & Faulds, 2009) do not focus on such specific goals. Therefore, we maintain that it is important to clearly distinguish between social networks and social media in research as diverse mediums definitely convey different consumer attitudes and representations. Using the terms separately is especially crucial to get a clear idea of the concept of social media and how it engages consumers. In an attempt to clarify the differences between social networking sites and social media, we show their distinct definitions, communication styles, and purposes in Table 3 below, according to literature:

Table 3 Key Differences between Social Networks and Social Media

	Social Networks	**Social Media**
1. Definition	"A tool or utility" for connecting, building of relationships (L. S. Cohen, 2009; Hartshorn, 2010)	"A strategy" for broadcasting information to large audience (L. S. Cohen, 2009; Hartshorn, 2010)
2. Communication Style	A two-way communication (Hartshorn, 2010)	"A system that delivers information to others" (Hartshorn, 2010)
3. Purpose	Meet/connect with people with similar interests (Hartshorn, 2010)	Opportunity to create, distribute content (Hartshorn, 2010)

1.2.3. Traditional Mass Media vs. Social Media

In their attempt to better understand the concept of social media, researchers have compared it to traditional mass media. To compare the two forms of media, Swift and Dawson (2013) opted to first clearly define them. Traditional media was defined as "long-established and paid media channels" such as television, print, radio, out-of-home advertising displays, newspapers, magazines, and radio, which all have the common goal to create awareness. Social media was then described as "any technology that allows people to network with one another". According to the researchers, traditional media reaches numerous consumers, but does not engage them. It is generally expensive, and it is not easily modifiable. Contrarily, social media allows a high consumer engagement. The content of social media is usually day-to-day, and can be presented on numerous

platforms. It is also costly, and requires management (Swift & Dawson, 2013). Other researchers have underlined the fact that, contrarily to mainstream media such as newspapers, magazines, television, radio, and yellow pages, information on social media can be modified dynamically with immediate feedback, comments and ratings (Scoble, 2007). In his analysis of social media, Cavazza (2009) used the following graphical comparison of traditional media and social media.

Image 1: Comparison of Traditional Media and Social Media (Cavazza, 2009)

In his comparison of the two media streams, Cavazza (2009) explained that with traditional media, one transmitter broadcasts a single message to multiple targets, whereas with social media, an individual may be both a broadcaster and a target, and may have the power of expression (Cavazza, 2009). Moreover, Zhao et al. (2011) attempted to compare the platform of Twitter and traditional mass media such as newspapers. The researchers focused on the differences of the content of the two types of media. The topics of content used in Twitter versus the topics used in traditional media, as well as the distribution of ideas were examined. Topics such as personal life, celebrities, and brands revealed to be more present on Twitter than in traditional media. Another difference included the "retweets" done in Twitter which accelerated the spreading of news (Zhao et al., 2011). These differences between Twitter and traditional mass media are interesting. However, they are limited to one sole platform of social media, Twitter. Understanding additional differences between traditional mass media and social media can help better clarify the phenomenon of social media.

1.3. Consumers' Goals, Feelings and Behaviors Associated with Social Media

The following section of the literature review presents information on consumers' goals, feelings, and behaviors associated with social media. These pieces of data may support our better

understanding of what social media represents in consumers' lives. Literature on these topics comes from different contexts. Readings include consumer behavior surveys (Baird & Parasnis, 2011), executive reports, blogs dedicated to the topic of social media, and research on social networking sites. We present the data in three main categories of goals, feelings, and behaviors, which we believe will contribute to getting a first picture of consumers' experiences with social media.

1.3.1. Goals of Using Social Media

Researchers have focused on consumers' goals of using social networking sites, the largest component of social media. Getting insights on the different motivations of using social networks can support our understanding of the importance of such mediums in the lives of consumers.

1.3.1.1. Goal of Connecting with People

Literature shows us that an important goal of using social media is to build connections with people. According to research, consumers access social media for their own personal goals, rather than to engage with brands (Baird & Parasnis, 2011). A Customer Relationship Management study done by the IBM Institute for Business Value indicates that 70% of consumers go to social media or social networking sites to "connect with network of friends and family", and only 23% use social media to "interact with brands" (Baird & Parasnis, 2011). Another study involving 7000 consumers revealed that 77% of users mentioned that they did not have a relationship with a brand because "It's just a brand, not a member of my family" (Freeman, Spenner, & Bird, 2012). Indeed, less than 0.5% of Facebook fans engaged with brands they had "liked" (Freeman et al., 2012).

Individuals online, like in real life, look for attention, affection and praise. Researchers have analyzed different consumer gratifications from the use of the Internet (Lin, 2001) and popular social networking sites like Facebook (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010). Studies reveal gratification in the form of affection, sharing, and sociability (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010). Users may share knowledge in online communities and social networks to get reputation and attain status (Burke, Marlow, & Lento, 2009; Hew & Hara, 2007).

Moreover, consumers may use networking platforms such as LinkedIn with the aim of connecting with professionals in fields of similar interests (Fawley, 2013). Nowadays, job searching is almost

done exclusively online (Russo, 2011), and LinkedIn has become a crucial tool in job searching (Bradley, 2011). Researchers have been studying the use of such career networking platforms in order to help consumers and marketers use them in the best ways for job searching and advertising.

1.3.1.2. Goal of Fulfilling Curiosity

Consumers may access social media to fulfill their curiosity about others. Research done on the reasons for the non-use of social networking sites showed that motivations for using social networks include passing time, communicating with friends, and fulfilling a need of curiosity and entertainment (Turan, Tinmaz, & Goktas, 2013). A study on deep motives to engage in social networks also revealed consumers' goals of entertainment and curiosity (Teichert et al., 2011). For users, going on Facebook represents a reward after working hard (Teichert et al., 2011). The aspect of seeing "what people were doing" was revealed to be a motivation. The goals of entertainment and fulfilling one's curiosity seem to be linked together. Facebook was compared to People magazine with the use of words such as "fun", "distraction", "mind candy", "gossipy" and "intriguing" expressed by consumers (Teichert et al., 2011). Seeing people's photos provides emotional pleasure representing a kind of intangible value which may motivate one's use of social media (Baird & Parasnis, 2011; Erickson, 2012).

1.3.1.3. Goal of Getting Value

When engaging in social media, users may look for something in return (Baird & Parasnis, 2011). In exchange for their time, participation, and personal information, they may search for tangible value (Baird & Parasnis, 2011). For instance, users may engage with brands on social media platforms to get discounts (Freeman et al., 2012). When asked about their activity on social media, consumers answered "getting discounts or coupons" and "purchasing products and services" (Baird & Parasnis, 2011).

Moreover, value sought on social media may also be intangible like in the form of gifts of advice and information (Baird & Parasnis, 2011; Erickson, 2012). For instance, consumers increasingly access social media to get reviews and opinions (Baird & Parasnis, 2011). It is known that individuals use their friends, relatives and acquaintances as a primary source of information for

purchases (Price & Feick, 1984). The dynamism of personal opinions and recommendations has more impact on consumer behavior than traditional media like advertising (Kim, 2007). A social commerce trend report shows that only 14% of consumers online trust advertising and celebrity endorsements, whereas 90% of consumers trust in recommendations from people they know and 70% from people they do not know ("Social Commerce Trends 2011," 2011). The use of electronic word of mouth (E-WOM) has been growing and has become very influential in the decision-making process of purchase (Zhang, Ye, Law, & Li, 2010). Indeed, consumers access more and more social media to get these personal opinions which they greatly value. 70% of online shoppers use consumer reviews as their main tool for purchase decisions ("Social Commerce Trends 2011," 2011; "Social Shopping: Reshaping the World of Retail,"). Online reviews exist for countless products and services. The travel industry is one of the most popular one for reviews, and hence is called "Travel 2.0" (Miguéns, Baggio, & Costa, 2008). Social travel networks such as Trip Advisor have been changing the way consumers book and plan their vacations (Miguéns et al., 2008). These consider referrals from individuals on these sites more trustworthy and reliable than information from suppliers (Miguéns et al., 2008). Research has been done on the topic of online reviews on such sites. For instance, authors have focused on the influence of Trip Advisor on hotel performance (Tuominen, 2011). Others have studied credibility perceptions on reviewing sites (Ayeh, Au, & Law, 2013).

Finally, another kind of intangible value sought on social media is in the form of news. Knowledge and information represent important resources to consumers (Zaltman & Zaltman; 2008). A survey done on motivations of using social media and social networking sites indicates that 49% of consumers access social media to get news (Baird & Parasnis, 2011).

1.3.1.4. Goals of Self-Presentation and Self-Promotion

Web pages, search engines, and virtual worlds provide users with the opportunity to self-extend in a digital world (Belk, 2013). Increasingly, consumers use social media to present themselves and promote themselves. For instance, they may present themselves through personal websites they create (Schau & Gilly, 2003). In the offline world, individuals may present themselves through the use of concrete or specific things such as the clothes they wear, or the places they visit. Differently, the self-presentation in a digital world is one that is continuous and unrestricted (Goffman, 1959; Schau & Gilly, 2003). Nowadays, consumers have the power to create and modify their online

image and brand to what they desire it to be. They have the tools to customize their identities as they wish (Schau & Gilly, 2003). Personal branding on social media is described as "the essence of who you are and what you want people to feel about you" (Wright, 2013). On social networks, individuals brand themselves ("The Story of Social Networking: A Timeless Catch-22," 2009) for an "imagined audience" (Marwick, 2011). For instance, they may develop and enhance their personal selves on the Internet (Sheth & Solomon, 2014), and "show-off their unique qualities" ("The Story of Social Networking: A Timeless Catch-22," 2009). Research shows that individuals increasingly use different social media platforms such as LinkedIn, blogs, and social networks to promote their branded selves (Lyons, 2013; Wright, 2013). Promoting oneself via social media may be a source of emotional pleasure for consumers (Lyons, 2013).

1.3.1.5. Goal of Individual Empowerment

Consumer empowerment through the use of social media has been studied in different contexts. When asked about their motives of using social networks, consumers conveyed a deep need to express themselves (Teichert et al., 2011). Online, consumers are more and more able to give their opinions and be heard by large masses in an easy and convenient manner. Thus, social media gives democratic power to consumers: "Now everybody with a mobile phone can be a critic, truly demonstrating the democratic power of the social web" ("Social Shopping: Reshaping the World of Retail,"). Researchers have concentrated on consumers' empowerment through social media by their larger access to information, their greater opportunity of giving opinions, and their better efficacy in making choices (Labrecque, vor dem Esche, Mathwick, Novak, & Hofacker, 2013). A larger access to information definitely enriches consumers as they have greater ability to find what they need (Brynjolfsson, Hu, & Smith, 2003). In addition, with the advance of the Web 2.0, individuals get empowered by their new ease and ability to receive and create content on social media (Labrecque et al., 2013).

1.3.2. Feelings Associated with Social Media

Oxford Dictionary defines a feeling as an "emotional state or reaction". The term "feeling" is used in this thesis to represent human emotions, desires, and affective thoughts. As individuals grow in age, events and objects evoke emotion and feeling, and these impact humans mentally and physically (Damasio, 2004). For instance, according to what they feel about something or

someone, a person may approach or withdraw, or they may decide to fight or flight (Damasio, 2004). Research reveals an array of feelings that are experienced by consumers on social media. There is a large focus on feelings associated with using social networking sites.

1.3.2.1. Feelings in Relation to Connection

Social media makes consumers feel numerous emotions in relation to their connection with others. On social networks, individuals feel connected (Teichert et al., 2011). They are able to feel each other's presence, exchange ideas and stories, and share experiences together ("The Story of Social Networking: A Timeless Catch-22," 2009). Connecting with others can make consumers feel powerful (Teichert et al., 2011). Social networks may represent "a network to tap when times are rough" (Erickson, 2012). For instance, the platform of YouTube, on which people watch and share videos with their friends and family, allows users to feel connected together (Haridakis & Hanson, 2009; Lee & Ma, 2012). Individuals view social networks as a place where they can feel appreciated, loved, and respected. Praise and admiration on social networks give individuals a warm emotional support ("The Story of Social Networking: A Timeless Catch-22," 2009).

As described, social media is associated with feelings of belonging and connectedness. However, consumers additionally report feeling fearful and lonely when they access social networks (Teichert et al., 2011). The next section focuses on consumers' feelings of relaxation and anxiety during their activities on social media.

1.3.2.2. Feelings of Relaxation and Anxiety

Research shows that social networking sites provide relaxing feelings to consumers. Individuals experience "a warm, energizing escape" while engaging in social networks. These represent an activity of leisure, and a "place to gather and relax, listen and laugh" ("The Story of Social Networking: A Timeless Catch-22," 2009). Specifically, Facebook represents an escape from everyday activities. When engaging in social networks, consumers feel like they can "forget all work stress and be happy", a feeling compared to the feeling of sitting in front of the sea (Teichert et al., 2011).

As we understand, social networking is revealed to be a relaxing activity. However, literature also shows that consumers feel anxious while on social networking sites. Anxiety is often related to the

concept of privacy which has been pervasive in recent research on social media. As it greatly impacts and influences the consumer's experience online, identity was revealed to be an important element related to social media according to researchers (Kietzmann et al., 2011). For users, revealing identity on social media is often a concern. Nowadays, consumers of social media have to balance the act of divulging their information such as their name, age, and location. Firms are left with a great challenge to retain their users by building trust, and keeping confidential information while not asking for too much. Numerous websites such as Divorce360 allow users to remain anonymous while discussing with others (Kietzmann et al., 2011). It is known that individuals wish to manage and control the perceptions that others have of them (Goffman, 1959). When on social networks, users often feel vulnerable to others' judgments ("The Story of Social Networking: A Timeless Catch-22," 2009; Teichert et al., 2011). In a study by Olson Zaltman Associates and TMRC Research and Strategy (2009), it was revealed that social networks are perceived as "invasive and aggressive", and they give anxiety feelings to consumers. For instance, users sometimes feel pressured to let people become part of their circle of friends in order to remain polite. These negative emotions influence consumers' mental states and behaviors. Users might not act the way they really desire to on social networks. For instance, one might change their image or the way they present themselves when going online. These feelings may lead to a big censoring of information. Consumers often have mental debates with themselves on whether to post things or remain silent on social networks ("The Story of Social Networking: A Timeless Catch-22," 2009; Teichert et al., 2011). Such decisions play an important role in consumers' minds. A research done in 2012 showed that privacy settings are increasingly used (Madden, 2012). According to a survey which used techniques of tracking and interviews with consumers of social networking sites, actions towards improving one's privacy such as unfriending others, untagging oneself from pictures, and deleting comments have been increasing in numbers from the year 2009 to 2011. These kinds of actions represent a process also known as "profile pruning" (Madden, 2012). Research shows that 58% of social networking users allow a limited access to their profiles, and women are the most inclined to impose restrictions and settings on their privacy (Madden, 2012).

1.3.3. Behaviors Associated with Social Media

We may now present literature related to the fact that social media impacts consumer behavior. Behavior is defined as "the way in which one acts or conducts oneself" (Oxforddictionaries.com). Research has focused on specific behaviors consumers experience when on social media.

1.3.3.1. Behaviors Involving Multi-Tasking

Today, consumers spend a lot of their time "media multi-tasking" or "using more than one medium at a time" (Sheth & Solomon, 2014). Over the years, the social media experience has grown into a complex phenomenon for consumers because of the added facet of accessing social media through devices such as cellphones and tablets. For instance, the trend of using a smart phone or a tablet while watching television began in 2011 ("Social Television: Ways To Engage," 2012), and involves multi-tasking behaviors from consumers. Indeed, social TV is the act of having various technologies surrounding your television which encourage "communication and social interaction related to program content" ("Social Television: Ways To Engage," 2012). Consumers may also give their say or vote live using social media applications such as Twitter (Armano, 2011). Consumers increasingly have to learn to juggle these new tools (Anderson & Wolff, 2010) in order to optimize their social media experience.

1.3.3.2. Behaviors Related to Learning Social Media

Nowadays, consumers experience numerous behaviors when learning to use social media. Researchers state that social media platforms and applications are easy to learn and use, and are perceived as intuitive (Erickson, 2012). However, other research shows that social media can be overwhelming and frustrating to consumers as these constantly feel the need to stay up-to-date and learn new tools to enhance their activities on social media (Samuel, 2011). Different characteristics of social media seem to be adding to the complexity of consumer behaviors. Marr (2014) analyzed how the Internet of nowadays comprises an immense volume of information. Consumers are reacting to this large amount of data. The researcher also discussed the speed at which data is generated on social media, and the perceived accuracy and trustworthiness of the data, which all have deep implications for consumers (Marr, 2014).

1.4. Conclusion of the Literature Review

The objective of the literature review was to clarify the phenomenon of social media and its relationship with consumers. Following our readings, we opted to present topics of research in two sections. First, we attempted to grasp meaning about social media by exposing researchers' definitions of the concept. During our quest, we noticed multiple definitions, and different ways researchers have attempted to define social media (by comparing it with social networks, and then with traditional mass media). For the purpose of having a clearer holistic view of the multiple definitions, we presented a synthesis definition of social media. However, we know that the social media experience of consumers "extends beyond the web" (Anonymous, 2011) which makes it even tougher to fully grasp. Managers of all industries are left with the great challenge of adapting social media to their business without having shared understanding of the concept. Social media is transforming consumers' lives every day. With a lack of knowledge about the phenomenon, marketers can make big mistakes such as trying to reach people the wrong way and thus losing potential customers. Our attempt to define social media was an important first step in moving closer to our research question: What does social media represent to consumers? With our gathered data on the definitions of the phenomenon, we definitely obtained some clarification on the topic, and we could then reasonably move further in our exploration in more light.

The second section of the literature review was concentrated on showing existing knowledge about features related to the phenomenon of social media and consumers' experiences online. With our readings, we were able to find precise data on specific topics in relation to social media. For instance, we found information about social networking sites, one important component of social media. We presented the data in a structural manner of three categories of the user experience: goals, feelings, and behaviors in relation to social media. We believed that information on goals and motivations of using social media platforms could enlighten our knowledge of the important role social media plays in the lives of individuals. In addition, feelings in relation to social media allowed interesting psychological insights to emerge. As well, research on consumers' behaviors in relation to social media revealed important data about users' everyday lives, activities, and reactions with the phenomenon. Readings illuminated us with first basic pictures and ideas.

As we combined the two sections of the literature review, we noticed that we do not have a holistic view and understanding of consumers' perceptions of social media. We believe that the phenomenon of social media is worthy of a more profound study with consumers themselves. The next chapter describes our selection of a method for our research.

Chapter 2 Methodology

2.1. Introduction

The literature review allowed us to get more knowledge on social media. We have identified key features of the concept and elements of data related to the phenomenon. However, our exploration of previous readings did not allow us to have a rounded view of consumers' experience with social media nowadays. We still don't fully understand what matters to consumers considering social media, and what social media represents to consumers. The objective of this thesis is to grasp candid perceptions of consumers to better understand what social media represents in their lives. With the consuming and revolutionary Internet phenomenon, research today requires more than ever rich insights from consumers. The following sections of this chapter reveal the reasons behind our decision to use a specific qualitative research method with in-depth interviews known as the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique or ZMET.

2.2. Quantitative vs. Qualitative Research

Various research methods exist to study consumers. In quantitative research, the investigator uses variables and hypotheses, and numerical data is collected. Strategies include experiments and survey questionnaires (Creswell, 2013). In qualitative research, the researcher formulates a problem claim based on primary knowledge. Data is collected in an open-ended format. Methods include narratives, phenomenologies, ethnographies, grounded theory, and case studies (Creswell, 2013).

When deciding on the best type of research to use, the researcher has to keep in mind the core research problem. When the objective of the research is to highlight factors of influence of an outcome, test a theory, or seek to confirm a hypothesis, quantitative methods are preferred (Creswell, 2013; Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005). Contrarily, when the research problem includes understanding a new phenomenon, for which existing research is scarce, and influence variables remain unknown, qualitative methods are best as they allow a thorough exploration of a new topic (Creswell, 2013; Mack et al., 2005). Generally, qualitative

research methods are particularly useful in revealing rich symbols of needs, desires, choices and meanings of individuals (Kozinets, 2002).

In this thesis, we wish to explore a new phenomenon and the depth of its impact on consumers' experiences. We are looking to describe and explore, rather than to confirm and quantify. Social media is a new phenomenon which requires a deep investigation using a qualitative approach. In order to fully grasp individual experiences with the phenomenon, we necessitate flexibility in our research method, something that quantitative measures lack (Mack et al., 2005). Mack et al. (2005) state the following: "the strength of qualitative research is its ability to provide complex textual descriptions of how people experience a given research issue" (p. 1). This kind of research allows deep personal feelings, opinions and emotions to surface (Mack et al., 2005).

2.3. Projective Techniques

During most research, consumers are often inclined to express "socially acceptable, functional and rational needs" (Hanlon & Livingston, 2006). Psychologists explain that individuals often repress underlying feelings and perceptions during interviews, because it makes them uncomfortable. Researchers are well-aware of the difficulty to surface deep emotions, which are often unconscious. Indirect measures such as projective techniques used since 1940 (Soley & Smith, 2008) can facilitate this challenge (Steinman, 2008). Clinical psychologists and psychiatrists were the first adopters of these methods (Donoghue, 2000). Projective techniques are useful and reliable to study consumers in market research (Fram & Cibotti, 1991). Different kinds of projective techniques include association, completion, construction, and expressive tasks (Steinman, 2008). Within these techniques, individuals are able to project their deeper thoughts onto other people, objects, or environments, and thus they create a defense mechanism in which their ego is protected (Steinman, 2008). Also referred to as disguised-unstructured techniques, these methods mask the goal of studies from participants and encourage them to express deep unconscious feelings (Klopfer & Taulbee, 1976; Steinman, 2008). Therefore, contrary to straightforward research methods during which more superficial insights surface, such psychological techniques help to discover deeper attitudes and feelings of consumers (Steinman, 2008). Researchers are able to better penetrate the subjective minds of consumers.

2.3.1. The ZMET Method

2.3.1.1. Imagery in Research

Pictorial methods are projective techniques that use visual aids to facilitate participants' formulation of responses and to get them to express ideas that would not otherwise be discussed. According to researchers, responses obtained by pictorial methods are not obtainable through other conservative approaches such as questionnaires (Sanford, 1950-1951). Among pictorial methods is the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique also known as the ZMET method, created by Gerald Zaltman, a professor at Harvard Business School. Researchers are more and more employing images and photography in research (Zaltman & Higie, 1993). According to Zaltman, business has often ignored the fact that consumers act and communicate in a non-verbal manner. As studies have shown, a great portion of human communication is non-verbal (Mehrabian, 1977). Indeed, research indicates that human beings' neural representations are in the form of images rather than words. In addition, individuals are generally unaware of their own internal thoughts (Zaltman, 2003). It can thus be quite challenging to grasp meaning through the mere words of consumers. In order to face this challenge and "see the voice of the consumer", ZMET studies were implemented with a big reliance on visual and sensory images (Zaltman & Higie, 1993). Images allow unconscious feelings and emotions about a topic to emerge. In its attempt to penetrate the mind of consumers, Zaltman uses imagery to elicit metaphors which we discuss in the following section.

2.3.1.2. Metaphors in Research

Conceptual metaphors or cognitive metaphors shape the way individuals think, and act (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008). Such metaphors are not the same as metaphors of language that we most often hear of, which are described as "novel or poetic linguistic expression where one or more words for a concept are used outside of its normal conventional meaning to express a similar concept" (Lakoff, 1993). In research, cognitive scientists describe metaphors as conceptualizations of a mental process in terms of another (Lakoff, 1993). In other words, metaphors are the representations of a thought in terms of another (Moser, 2000; Zaltman, 2003). For example, a couple might say "our relationship has hit a dead-end street." In this expression, the notion of love is conceptualized as a journey which is being discontinued (Lakoff, 1993).

Metaphors shape the thoughts and reflections of human beings. Researchers use metaphors to analyze consumers' dialogue because they convey meaning easily (Joy, Sherry Jr, Venkatesh, & Deschenes, 2009), and allow abstractions which guide consumers' minds to emerge (Zaltman, 2003). For complex concepts in research, the process of eliciting metaphors is useful because it serves to represent a topic in its totality (Moser, 2000). In addition, the use of metaphors in qualitative research adds depth in studies (Moser, 2000). It helps to organize the data in a structural manner, give a new and creative perspective of analysis, and facilitates the emergence of deep feelings and emotions (Carpenter, 2008). This way of understanding consumers' speech can greatly benefit marketers.

During his research studies, Zaltman (2008) identified seven big metaphors that most frequently emerge across diverse areas of study. According to the researcher, these metaphors surface no matter the gender, age, and cultural backgrounds of individuals. The seven metaphors and their impact on consumer thinking are shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4 "The Seven Giants" (Source: marketingmetaphoria.com)

Metaphors	Description
Balance	*"How justice, equilibrium, and the interplay of elements affect consumer thinking"*
Transformation	*"How changes in substance and circumstances affect consumer thinking"*
Journey	*"How the meeting of past, present, and future affects consumer thinking"*
Container	*"How inclusion, exclusion, and other boundaries affect consumer thinking"*
Connection	*"How the need to relate to oneself and others affects consumer thinking"*
Resource	*"How acquisitions and their consequences affect consumer thinking"*
Control	*"How the sense of mastery, vulnerability, and well-being affect consumer thinking"*

2.3.1.3. The ZMET Interview

The three most common qualitative research methods are participant observation, in-depth interviews, and focus groups (Mack et al., 2005). In-depth interviews are best to collect information on personal experiences and perceptions (Mack et al., 2005). During research

interviews, investigators often use discourse and conversation with verbatim transcriptions: "the word-for-word reproduction of verbal data, where the written words are an exact replication of audio recorded words" (Halcomb & Davidson, 2006). Verbatim transcription is essential for the "reliability, validity and veracity" of the data (Halcomb & Davidson, 2006).

In-depth interviews lasting for two hours are used in the ZMET method. On average, ten interviews are required to elicit 100% of constructs about a topic of research (Zaltman & Higie, 1993). ZMET interviews require a certain commitment from participants. These are invited to collect ten images which, for them, represent the theme of study, and are asked to do so seven to ten days before the interview. This preliminary step allows participants to reflect upon and feel involved with the topic of study (Zaltman, 1998). When arriving to the interview, their minds are ready to explore the meanings behind their images (Zaltman, 1998). ZMET researchers believe that people in common situations reveal shared deep feelings and ideas (Zaltman, 1996). Imagery is used to highlight the metaphors that shape consumers' thoughts. ZMET interviews are conducted in multiple steps which allow important themes to emerge. These steps are summarized in Table 5 below.

Table 5 The Original ZMET Method (Zaltman, 1998)

Steps (in order)	Description	Purpose
Storytelling	Participants are asked to describe their images one by one. The researcher asks questions about the meaning of each image in relation to the main theme of study.	Telling stories allows to easily convey metaphors as mental processes of humans are in the form of stories
Kelly Grid	Three images are selected randomly and participants are asked to compare the three images (how they are different, and how they are similar).	Highlight differences between concepts
Changing the Picture	Participants are asked to discuss changes in their images	To uncover hidden feelings
Sensory Metaphors	Questions related to color, taste, smell, touch, and sound of the topic of study are asked to the participant	Exploration of meanings
Vignette	Participants are asked to create a short movie or story with their images.	Motion and time are explored to help express important ideas
Digital Imaging	Participant is asked to create a summary with the images with the help of a computer graphic expert.	New ideas to emerge

2.4. Our Approach

Our participants were contacted with an e-mail that included a description of the study, and the requirement of the following preliminary step in preparation for the interview (please see email in appendices): approximately ten days prior to the interview, participants were asked to gather ten images of what social media represents for them. They were asked to print the images and bring the hard copies to the interview. In order to avoid influence from other parties, we asked participants not to bring any images of advertisements, which could bias their individual perceptions. In addition, to certify the potential for deep discussions rather than a simplified discourse with our informants, we asked them to preferably not bring images of company logos. For their time and participation in the study, participants were told that they would be getting a compensation of $30 in cash at the day of the interview.

For our research, we have adopted a few modifications to the original ZMET technique. For instance, we believe it is important to compute comparisons of all the images. We asked participants to classify their images into groups. This step could be helpful in highlighting the most important themes of study. We then asked them to compare the groups of images together. Later, rather than discussing changes in their images, we believe that making a choice on the most representative image, and imagining an opposite image of the topic were better options to yield significance in concepts, and give them a new perspective. Finally, the vignette and the digital imaging steps were modified as we asked participants to create a paper collage rather than a computer generated collage with the help of an expert, a resource that we did not have. Our interviews were administered by following a discussion guide found in Appendix 2. The research steps are summarized in the Table 6 below.

Table 6 Research Method Used Adapted According to the Original Method (Zaltman, 1998)

Steps	Description	Purpose
Preliminary step	We question the participant on his/her Internet activity (example: How long have you been using the Internet, how many hours a day do you spend online?)	Get a better picture of what kind of consumer he/she is.
Step 1. Storytelling	The respondent presents his images one by one, describes the content and the story behind it by making a link with the theme of Social Media. He/she is asked to give a title for each image.	-Participant describes the reason why he/she chose the image, and voices his thoughts about it -Giving a title allows the main concept to emerge
Step 2: Missed Images	We ask the respondent if there was one or more images that he wasn't able to find to represent the theme of Social Media. If so, he/she is asked to describe or draw this (these) image(s).	We identify additional concepts important to consumers.
Step 3: Sorting Task	The informant is asked to take all his/her images and classify them into separate groups.	Bring out themes that are central and unifying.
Step 4: Construct Elicitation	The researcher randomly selects two groups of images that were created, and asks the informant to compare the two groups (how they are similar and how they are they different). The step is repeated with all the other pairs of groups, until all pairs are done.	Brings out the most important and the ways they are linked.
Step 5: Representative Image	The informant is asked to identify the image that best represents the concept of Social Media	Involves a choice in order to take important concepts from a new perspective.
Step 6: Opposite Image	The informant is asked to describe or draw an image that represents the opposite of Social Media.	Ibid.
Step 7: Sensory Images	The researcher asks a series of questions related to human senses (taste, smell, touch, hearing, feeling) to describe the concept of Social Media.	Involves the other senses of the consumer to reveal additional or different feelings.
Step 8: The Summary Image	The informant is asked to use all his/her images to make a collage that represents Social Media. He/she is then asked to tell the story behind the collage.	Creates a view of the ensemble of the concpets, in relevance with each other, to reveal new ideas

2.4.1. Sample and Choice of Participants

The ZMET method generally requires a certain number of interviews to be done to reveal a fairly complete array of concepts. With the objective of the study in mind, the main researcher is in position to decide when to conclude the interviewing process as he/she notices a saturation of concepts. In this research, ten interviews were done. Acquaintances (from two degrees of separation with the main researcher) provided names and profiles of people who could be

potential participants. This maneuver certified a non-biased study in which the researcher had no direct link with the informant. Participants aged eighteen or older were recruited. In order to obtain complete knowledge on the research matter, participants represented a diversity of profiles. Factors such as gender, age, and social media knowledge were used to assure heterogeneity. The main researcher had the opportunity to travel during the interviewing process. As a result, eight interviews were conducted in the city of Montreal, and two in Boston. The settings were selected at the discretion of the informants: five interviews were done in coffee shops, three in university conference rooms, one in a work location, and one in an apartment. The interviews were audio-recorded, and then transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Ten interviews were completed over the period of eight months. The following Table 7 summarizes the profiles of our ten participants.

Table 7 Profile of Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Occupation	Internet Consumption	Mobile Access to Social Media	Online Usage
Carrie	F	26	Manager of Social Media for a firm	Since 12 years old. Online 1.5 hours per day	iPhone	Facebook, Gmail, Pinterest, Twitter
Naomi	F	25	Speech Language Pathologist	Since 13 years old. Online 3 hours per day. Half on computer half on phone	iPhone	Facebook and Facebook Groups
Jerry	M	27	Student in law	Since 13 years old. Online 24 hours per day. When at home: computer. When out: always has his phone with him.	Loves his iPhone, feels naked without it: "I was dying without my phone"	Twitter, Facebook, News sites, podcasts, Game League of Legends, Wiki Leaks
Cecilia	F	23	Elementary School Teacher. Baker (her own business)	Since 10 years old. Online 1-2 hours per day. On computer, phone and tablet.	iPhone, Blackberry tablet she loves	Facebook (checks 3 times a day), shopping sites, Reddit.com, recently LinkedIn

Albert	M	30	PhD student in Marketing. Owner of a book museum	Since he was 17 or 18. Online 16 hours per day.	iPhone5	Facebook, Google Reader, YouTube, Viber
Samuel	M	36	Financial Services Manager	Since he was 15 years old. Online 5-8 hours per day, (Half work, half leisure)	iPhone5 + Siri	Facebook, Grindr, WhatsApp, Siri (his "personal assistant"), Twitter, follows revolutions on news sites
Audrey	F	33	Consultant in Change Management	Since she was 16 years old. Online 2 hours per day.	Blackberry	Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, she likes to read real magazines ("feel the touch of the paper")
Tim	M	50	Director of Engineering	Since the mid to late 80's, but more as an entertainment thing since the mid 90's. Online all the time with his iPhone, but if not a few hours a day.	iPhone	Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter for business, reads a lot of blogs (Tech Crunch, Boing Boing, Gadget)
Charlotte	F	60	Director of Education and Enrichment Programs, Professor at University	Since she was 31 (in 1984). Online 2-3 hours per day.	An "embarrassing" phone, iPad at home	Facebook, Facebook groups, Amazon.com, Site she uses for her teaching work, Epicurious, TripAdvisor, Yelp, Opentable
Elaine	F	51	Finance data processing	Since she was 41 years old.	No cell phone, does not want one now (waste of money)	Facebook (checks twice every 6 months), Google, Pinterest (on her daughter's account)

2.4.2. Data Analysis

Following the interviewing process, the researcher used the audio-recordings to transcribe the discourse with consumers verbatim. Then, the researcher administered coding of the data

(Saldana, 2009) with the use of a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), named RQDA. Coding qualitative data allows reduction and organization of the material in a systematic way which facilitates the searching, comprehension, and analysis (Cope, 2010). Spiggle (1994) presents the procedures done to manipulate or tackle qualitative data. First, the researcher may classify themes of study in separate categories with the use of names or labels, according to the emerging meanings identified. The second manipulation includes abstraction of the data. As the researcher identifies patterns and themes present in the data, they may then group the various classifications into limited general constructs, in our case metaphors of the consumers' mind. Other manipulations include comparing the different constructs to identify new meanings, and describing the characteristics and attributes of categories, a process known as dimensionalization. The researcher may then do an integration of the data or the "mapping of relationships between conceptual elements" (Spiggle, 1994, p. 495). These mentioned steps of the analysis are done once initially, and are to be repeated afterwards to ensure a thorough recognition of themes in accordance with the order of stages as they take place (Spiggle, 1994). Following the coding process, an inter-individual analysis was done to deepen and complete the knowledge on each participant of the study. Common to all informants, three general metaphors were identified and classified with their sub-themes. The following chapter presents our results in a structural manner.

Chapter 3 Results

3.1. Introduction

Our in-depth interviews allowed us to highlight three significant metaphors that shape the minds of consumers of social media: the metaphors of connection, control, and resource (Zaltman & Zaltman, 2008). By analyzing these metaphors of speech, we were in a position to better grasp how consumers' ideas are formed, and the deep reasons behind their behaviors. In addition, within consumers' discourse, we noticed important allusions to geographical dimensions which embody and shape users' experiences on social media: the dimensions of space, time, and speed. These three dimensions emerged through consumers' use of precise terms such as "fast" representing the dimension of speed, or verbal descriptions referring to a specific dimension. As we further analysed our data, we understood that social media represented a world that is penetrated by individuals, and like in the offline world, individuals within the world of social media psychologically sensed the atmosphere within dimensions of space, time, and speed. This knowledge allowed us to grasp a new perspective of the experience individuals live within social media. Most interestingly, this new lens of geographical themes came in to complement and add on a deeper understanding of the metaphors of thought of consumers. As we unionized the metaphors with the dimensions of the human experience, we were left with combined themes of study that came to reveal the most depth and complexity of meanings associated with social media.

To enable a structured reading of the results, we shall first describe the three main metaphors identified within consumers' speech. Then, we will define the three geographical dimensions of the human experience. Following these descriptions, we will show how consumers experience the combination of metaphors and dimensional themes of experience.

According to Zaltman and Zaltman (2008), the metaphor of connection emerges due to the fact that humans have an important need to connect with others and to belong (Zaltman & Zaltman, 2008). Humans feel and look for connection physically, socially, or mentally. Since evolutionary times, humans constantly formed connections and attachment with animals, objects, places, and events. Individuals may act a certain way, often in an unconscious manner, to fulfill their need of

belonging and affiliation. For instance, they will associate their own identity to the ones of groups they belong to. When feeling disconnected from the world, individuals will report isolation, fear, and anxiety. This thesis highlights frequent references to the need to connect with others. Consumers will often be expressing words of ownership, such as "my friends", and ideas referring to sharing with others or "giving or receiving gifts" (Zaltman & Zaltman, 2008).

Moreover, the metaphor of control exists in many aspects of life. Individuals have an unconscious motivation to control themselves, other people, and situations. For instance, they look to have control over their different relationships and events. Consumer behavior and well-being are highly influenced by the perception of control. Controlling a situation can give a person a strong sense of "empowerment, confidence, and belief in one's ability to succeed" (Zaltman & Zaltman, 2008, p. 166). On the other hand, when one feels out of control, they may feel disoriented. Control influences consumers mentally and physically. For example, individuals who feel a loss of control in their life may indulge in junk food. The metaphor of control can sometimes yield a paradox of emotions. For instance, one might despise their feeling of lacking control, while enjoying it at the same time. Control also highly influences consumers' decisions. When making personal choices, consumers will exert an important sense of control as they will try to control all the factors around their decision. They may use their own judgements to balance their amount of control over a situation (Zaltman & Zaltman, 2008).

This thesis also highlights the metaphor of resource which reveals the use of intermediate instruments that allow humans to achieve conscious and unconscious goals. Those instruments or resources may be tangible like tools or people, or intangible like knowledge. In Marketing, products and services represent resources to help consumers fulfill needs and wishes. Resources may become essential in helping humans feel satisfied and gratified as they fulfill basic as well as deep psychological needs (Zaltman & Zaltman, 2008).

During our analysis, we may note that allusions to other metaphors of thought such as the metaphor of journey, balance and container (Zaltman & Zaltman, 2008) were rarely noticed. For instance, one's presence into the world of social media was sometimes perceived as a journey within time. However, because the reference to these metaphors were rare and did not present a large content of data, we decided to concentrate on the metaphors that emerged the most for our

analysis, and which contained the most information: the ones of connection, control, and resource.

Furthermore, we may now define the spatial-temporal dimensions of the human experience in order to get a better understanding of the psychological immersion of consumers into the world of social media. As proved in the laws of physics, humans sense geographical dimensions of space, time, and speed as they experience their life on earth. And, similarly yet differently, individuals experience these dimensions as they enter the online world of social media.

We may first describe the dimension of space. Space is defined as "the dimensions of height, depth, and width within which all things exist and move" (Oxforddictionaries.com). Tuan (1977) studied individuals' reactions within space and place, and how they allocate meaning to space and place. The researcher wrote: "Space and place are basic components of the lived world; we take them for granted. When we think about them, however, they may assume unexpected meanings and raise questions we have not thought to ask." (Tuan, 1977, p.3) Within space, humans are guided by their senses. Individuals experience space within their ability of movement, and within movement, humans develop a sense of direction. A space may feel restricted or it may feel open and infinite (Tuan, 1977). Nowadays, technology gives consumers the opportunity to access many different worlds or spaces, which are not restricted by laws of physics (Sheth & Solomon, 2014). When individuals "go online", they penetrate another world (Sheth & Solomon, 2014). A space is an abstract area composed of different concrete places, just like a forest: "a dense net of places with no overall structure" (Tuan, 1977). In this thesis, the dimension of space emerges as social media represents an open space which consumers penetrate. Within this space, definite places or platforms exist, such as the platforms of Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn. With time, individuals allocate meaning and emotion to places (Tuan, 1977). Space and place complement each other. For instance, an individual may feel secure in a place due to the fact that he feels free within that space (Tuan, 1977). Nowadays, with consumers penetrating the online world so frequently, authors believe that young consumers no longer make the distinction between "being online" and "being offline" because the frontier between physical and digital reality is slowly disappearing (Sheth & Solomon, 2014). We thus wonder how the growing penetration into the space of social media affects consumers.

Another geographical dimension of the consumer experience is time. Time is defined as "the indefinite continued progress of existence and events in the past, present, and future regarded as a whole" (Oxforddictionaries.com). Tuan studied the relativeness of time and place and how the two dimensions are experienced subconsciously. Time is like a rhythm in space, the author noted (Tuan, 1977, p. 186). It is a "motion or flow" which gives meaning to a place now characterized as "a pause in the temporal current" (Tuan, 1977, p. 179). Indeed, individuals' sense of time will affect their sense of space and place. For instance, one's presence somewhere is relative to one's perception of time or the moment, and a person may develop attachment to a place due to his or her idea of time (Tuan, 1977). Movement, effort, freedom, goal, and accessibility imply the notion of time (Tuan, 1977, p. 118). Nowadays, individuals spend a lot of their time online. A study shows that consumers aged 8 to 18 spend about 7 hours per day on the space of social media (Sheth & Solomon, 2014).

The third dimension of the human experience is a product of the first two: speed. Collins Dictionary defines speed as "the act or quality of acting or moving fast; rapidity". Indeed, speed involves a distance or space, and a perception of time. In this thesis, consumers' perception of time speeding up is a complex and interesting notion. Speed and time are subjective concepts which have a strong influence on individuals' lives. With age, a person can feel that things are going faster (Gregoire, 2013). Psychologists show that technology might be speeding up perceptions of time and changing the way consumers' experience time (Zimbardo & Boyd, 2008). Ideally, individuals should aim to perceive time with a certain balance (Zimbardo & Boyd, 2008).

As the metaphors and dimensions of the human experience have been described in general, we may now relate them specifically to our topic of research, social media. As explained, uniting the six concepts together allowed the creation of new combinations which reveal the most depth in our results. Thus, we have opted to present the results of consumers' experience with social media in a structured manner. First, we will present findings related to the metaphor of connection and its combinations with the themes of space, time, and speed. Second, we will be showing the results associated with the metaphor of control unionized with the dimensional themes. And, lastly, we will present the permutations of themes with the metaphor of resource. The three by three matrix shown in Table 8 on the following page illustrates the union of the six themes and their general descriptions. This combined structure presents our results in a structural manner that is clear and exhaustive.

Table 8 Union of Metaphors and Dimensions of the Human Experience

		Metaphors of Social Media		
		Connection *(Need of affiliation with others, bonding with others, keeping in touch, staying up to date)*	**Control** *(Making choices, feeling in control of a situation or a thing, feeling of losing control, feeling free)*	**Resource** *(Tool for survival, to be happy, to manage something, to obtain something)*
Experiences of Social Media	**Space** *(Social media as a place, an area)*	The social media space allowing connections with others (keeping in touch, sense of belonging, etc.), interchanging with others. At times, creating a disconnection with others.	The social media space allowing one to be in control or making one lose control, feeling disoriented.	The social media space creating an opportunity to do something, to obtain something, to grow, to emancipate (which couldn't be done otherwise or could be done with more difficulty).
	Time *(Relativeness to time, duration, time management, perception of time passing)*	A link between time spent on social media and building connections with others.	The level of control impacting time spent on social media.	Time (saved) using social media allowing an opportunity.
	Speed *(Relationship between space and time, challenges or opportunities associated with speed, contraction of space and time, social acceleration)*	The speed of social media allowing connections to be made.	The speed of social media (speed of evolution and change) impacting level of control on social media.	The speed of social media is contributing to an opportunity.

3.2. The Metaphor of Connection

3.2.1. Social Media as a Space for Building Connections

3.2.1.1. Increased Amount of Connections

The social media space is creating a world that is more connected as it allows a bigger potential accessibility to people. Consumers mention for instance how Facebook has given them this opportunity to augment their number of connections. Thanks to social media, Audrey is able to reunite with some friends from her past. Without access to this space, she wouldn't have been able to have these friends in her life. During her youth, Audrey made numerous friends in different continents as she traveled the world with her family. Now living in Montreal, she lost touch with all these contacts which were actually very important to her. Reuniting with these friends via the space of social media brings her memories from her youth, and thus gives Audrey a lot of joy. In her Image 2 below entitled "Get Together Again", Audrey illustrates her feelings of happiness and joy about rekindling her friendships thanks to social media.
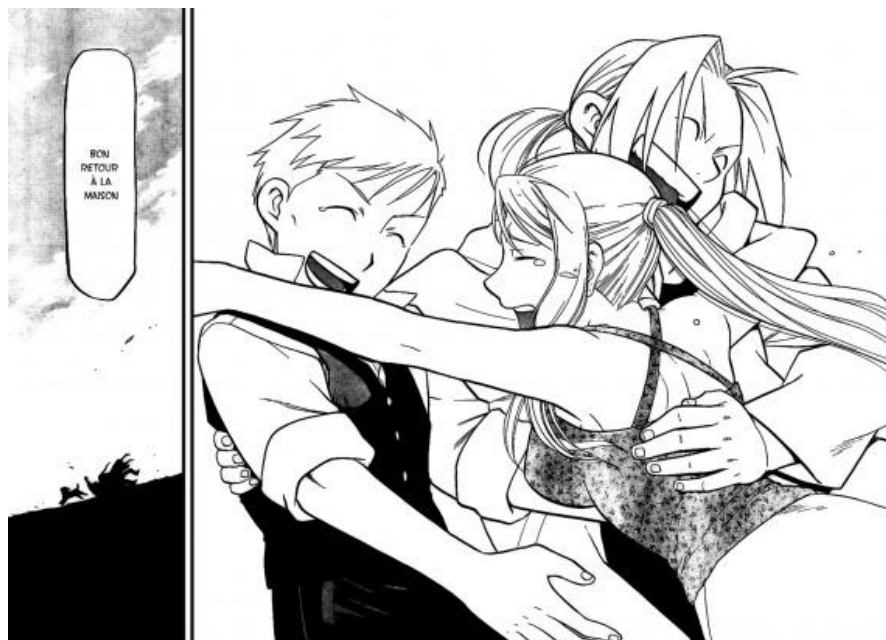
Image 2: "Get Together Again"

"I: Get together again. It means that with Facebook you can find… because I, I traveled a lot since I'm 4 years old. I moved with my parents every two years from one country to another, so it's very practical for me to use Facebook to find old friends. I found lost friends from 10-15 years ago and I found them on Facebook, and I mean I was so happy because we started chatting and sending pictures and I mean it was great, now I know how they are, what they're doing and where they're living, and it's nice.

R: How would you describe your feeling about this picture?

I: Like woo! (laughs). Like you know when you're seeing again a person that you didn't see for like 15 or 20 years, you're like very, very happy and it's like it's making you like…I don't know what to say instead of happy (giggles). It's a French expression like "chaud au coeur". It's like a very good feeling like yeah. I don't know what to say! (giggles). I'm smiling, I'm happy, I found a new friend, not a new friend, an old friend! And it's making me happy during a few days or weeks, it's nice, it's a good feeling." (Audrey)

Moreover, an additional outcome of the greater accessibility to people through the space of social media is the new chance to reach diverse connections. Albert describes the idea that thanks to the space of social media, he is now able to add diversity in his relations. When explaining his thoughts on this matter, Albert expresses his excitement about the future. He also explains how this new easiness and accessibility to diversity is something that may modify human relationship dynamics, and thus change many mental and physical aspects such as behaviors. For instance, Albert mentions how the ease in reaching different potential partners could impact the lives of couples in the following citation:

"The fact that you're connected to, like virtually six billion people adds to diversity, so you could assume that the length of relationships is shrinking, the depth is getting smaller, and the dynamics are different, like we have more and more anxious partners, jealous partners, because the possibilities of stepping outside the relationship is much higher and much easier, and I think people are getting to accept that. So, the mankind is gonna change." (Albert)

3.2.1.2. Increased Depth of Connections

The space of social media not only increases the quantity of connections, it also increases the depth of connections. On social media, users have a large access to details of the life of others, when in real life, such pieces of information would not have been revealed or exposed. The social media space is one that is definitely favorable to the exposure of information. Hence, connections lived through social media grow in depth as individuals know more and more about each other. Individuals are curious about the lives of others for different reasons. As social media allows details about others to easily emerge, consumers use this space to fulfill their curiosity. For instance, Samuel truly enjoys finding out about other people's lives via the space of social media. He does this as a daily routine, when he wakes up in the morning with his coffee and the television on. In his Image 3 below entitled "Social Media HD", Samuel describes his way of using the space of social media to fulfill his curiosity about people, and how he finds it highly entertaining.

Image 3: "Social Media HD"

"I: It's like a TV screen into the life of every single person it allows me to see what their thoughts are, their opinions, their interests, etc., and what they're up to basically. […] I'm following them, I'm watching what they're doing […]

R: Let's say this is you (person in the picture), do you have a role in this?

I: Well I mean the purpose of it is entertainment. So you're sitting down, you just… You know my hands are like this, so I'm not doing anything, I'm not sharing any information I'm just leaning back and I'm just watching everybody around me just interact and react and post and share, I'm just staying there entertained about the whole, the whole thing." *(Samuel)*

In addition, connections built through social media grow in depth as the information posted on that space allows consumers to stay updated with the lives of their peers. For instance, Audrey feels closer to her friends as she is able to view their lives, activities and events. With the Image 4 below entitled "Voyeurism", Audrey explains that she does some positive voyeurism over her friends on social media and it is her way of keeping close to them.

Image 4: "Voyeurism"

"From my side, I'm doing voyeurism but in a good way I would say, because I'm just trying to check what they are doing, what they have done recently, where they have been on vacation. For example, my friend is posting her vacation pictures on Facebook, she's living in France, I'm going to check the pictures. It could be interpreted as a bit of voyeurism but it's not bad, I'm not seeing her very often so it's a way to be closer with her and to be part

of her life even if I'm staying here [giggles], so yeah, it's a way to be closer with my friend."

(Audrey)

Moreover, the exposure of information on the space of social media can satisfy the uncertainties and curiosities consumer parents may have about their children. For instance, Charlotte uses social media to keep track of her daughter. The information provided on that space gives her not only the chance to see her daughter's life, but also to interact with her and reach out to her. The following quote illustrates a parent's way, like Charlotte's, of using the space of social media for the purpose of keeping in touch with their children, and deepening their relationships together.

"Before I was on Facebook so that I could keep track of my daughter who wrote everything on Facebook. […] I took a picture of my dog because I was watching Westminster Dog Show so I put it up and I used this page to talk to my friends and to engage my daughter, and I knew if I posted something about the dog, I would get something back from my daughter." (Charlotte)

3.2.1.3. Omnipresent Connection

Nowadays, consumers have the opportunity to access the social media space through different devices such as their laptops and their phones. Due to the ease of accessibility to social media, consumers reveal how social media is now omnipresent in their lives, and thus they feel perpetually connected to people, like Cecilia mentions: *"wherever I go I feel like I'm always connected".*

We present findings on the ways consumers increasingly use their mobile phones to access social media. It has become a new main entry or "gateway" into the world of social media. In the following Image 5 and citation, Jerry describes the ubiquity of his connection on social media via his smartphone. In Jerry's quote, we notice a great aspect of convenience associated with social media, as he describes the extent to which he is able to always receive messages from his peers, no matter where he is.

Image 5: "iPhone"

"This is the gateway to social me.. like, for me this is one of the main gateways to social media. And I mean, it is social media at the same time [clear throat] [...] The iPhone allows me to have access to social media as long as I'm holding the phone in my hand. So before, I had, you know, if you don't have an iPhone on or anything you'd have to wait to get to a computer to be able to go check my Facebook messages or check my Twitter feed or whatever else I wanna check, but when you're holding that, you literally are connected 24 hours. You know like if someone sends me a message on Facebook that'll push on my screen and I'll see it so that's why I was answering like it's this that allows me to be on social media for 24 hours a day pretty much." (Jerry)

Moreover, informants reveal that social media and mobile phones have in fact become strong complements of each other. Naomi, in her following quote, describes how without her mobile phone, she would not see the use of social media. Her phone allows her to access what she needs, at any time of the day. Her phone has become something essential for allowing her to make use of social media as she explains the following:

"The first [image] I picked was the iPhone just because, for me, it's kind of the anchor of all the social media. It's how I connect to it the most. [...] To me, this is what it all revolves around. Like, really, the iPhone is where I have access to everything and where I get all my updates kind of essentially provided to me via this device. If I didn't have it, then social media would be not very useful for me at all." (Naomi)

Moreover, consumers mention that a ubiquitous access to social media can be negative. Social media's omnipresence can make consumers feel invaded, anxious, and distracted. On his phone, Samuel gets messages from WhatsApp, Facebook, and Grindr, all at the same time. Being continuously connected to social media gives Samuel anxiety. For instance, when Samuel is trying to spend quality time with his family, his phone with constant rings and notifications from social media highly distracts him. Social media being continuously present in consumers' lives can be quite mentally overwhelming. Individuals' minds are now filled with thoughts emerging from social media platforms and applications. Indeed, social media has become so invading that when asked to think of an image that would represent the opposite of social media, Samuel describes the image of a monk meditating. In the following quote, he explains how monks feel peaceful and serene, away from any access to social media or connections:

> *"When a Buddhist monk is meditating you're clearing your mind of any outside influence or force, you're trying to find peace with yourself, and sometimes social media can give you that sense of anxiety, 'cause you feel like you need to be caught up with everything that's around you all the time... at least I do, that's how I feel sometimes. You know, when I'm at work and I'm getting one WhatsApp message, Facebook messages, and this, and that, and my Grindr is going on, it's like overwhelming, you know? It creates anxiety. So, the monk searching for inner peace and for clarity, and you know, meditating, to try to not think about anything at all, would be the opposite of social media completely." (Samuel)*

3.2.1.4. The Space Connection Paradox

Furthermore, some informants reveal that connecting on social media can actually negatively disconnect people together. Accessing social media and thus connecting and getting in touch with people via mobile phones and computers can actually detract from the goal of connecting. Rather than feeling closer together, consumers may feel increasingly disconnected. In the following citation, Naomi explains how connecting through the space of social media is affecting her relationships with her friends. When sitting together in a social gathering, Naomi noticed how her peers are caught up in the social media space rather than being mentally present in the physical moment. Naomi is disappointed in this relationship dynamic as she explains:

"You can be with your friends and everyone's on their phones, and it's like, why can't we just spend time together? So, it's good and bad. It's bad in the sense you can get so addicted to it that it actually will do the opposite, it will disconnect you from the people who are actually sitting in front of you." (Naomi)

Some consumers negatively perceive their connections built via social media. While social media might be increasing connections and augmenting in depth, informants nonetheless disclose how their connections built via computers or phones are simply not as satisfying as connecting and meeting in real life. Social media gives them the negative perception of losing human touch. In the Image 6 below of two people connecting via a computer, Cecilia explains that rather than getting to meet a person in real life, something which she greatly values, connections on the social media space can remain artificial as they deepen solely through the computer.

Image 6: "Cyber-Connection"

"I think we end up losing personal touch also. Instead of meeting somebody face to face, you meet them online and you never get to know what the person really looks like. You see a picture and whatever, but you don't actually see the person, and that, I think is a loss in the sense of social media […] They connect, but not in person." (Cecilia)

3.2.2. Time Required for Building Connections

Building connections on social media can require time. Consumers perceive certain social media platforms as unrewarding due to the hours and effort necessitated to build connections, and their ineffective outcomes. For instance, Carrie wishes to connect with her family via the social media space when she travels, for example. For her, blogging represents an activity that could be used to connect as she could update them about her life and her activities during her trip. She explains that she doesn't participate in the activity of blogging because she perceives it as a highly time consuming activity which requires a lot of work. In addition, she believes that if she were to write a blog, not many people besides her family would read it. In her following quote, the informant explains that she would write an email to her family telling them about her trip rather than putting in the time and effort to create a blog:

> *"If I wrote a blog about going to Australia and about everything I do in Australia, it's a very limited number of people who are gonna read that blog: my family, my friends are gonna ready it, and that's it. I'd prefer to just write that in an email. For me, the time to set the blog website and all that, I'd rather just send an email and attach a few pictures in my email and send that off. So it's not something negative, it's just kind of… I don't really care. […] I probably won't take the time like if I have a limited amount of time for traveling, I won't take the time out of that to go write a blog, I'd rather just… 'cause blogging, not only you put content, like text, you have to format it, you want it to look pretty, I'd rather just write an email where it could be quick, I can write a few lines: 'here's a picture of me here, I'll try to talk to you later'. So I think that this is like an activity, it's time consuming, it's… you're dedicated, you really wanna create a nice product with your blog, which for sharing information that's only gonna be shared with my family and friends, it's not something that I would put a lot of time into. It's not gonna be read by a lot of people." (Carrie)*

3.2.3. Speed Contributing to Building Connections

Consumers associate social media to having a fast pace which contributes to their creating of connections. Two aspects are at the core of this idea. First, thanks to the rapid speed of social media, people can connect in a fast fashion. In the Image 7 below entitled "Connectivity or Six Degrees of Separation", Naomi explains how individuals all over the world are actually closely

related together in reality (or only separated by six intermediates), and it is thanks to the fast pace of social media that they may actually be able to connect together easily, as she describes in the following quote:
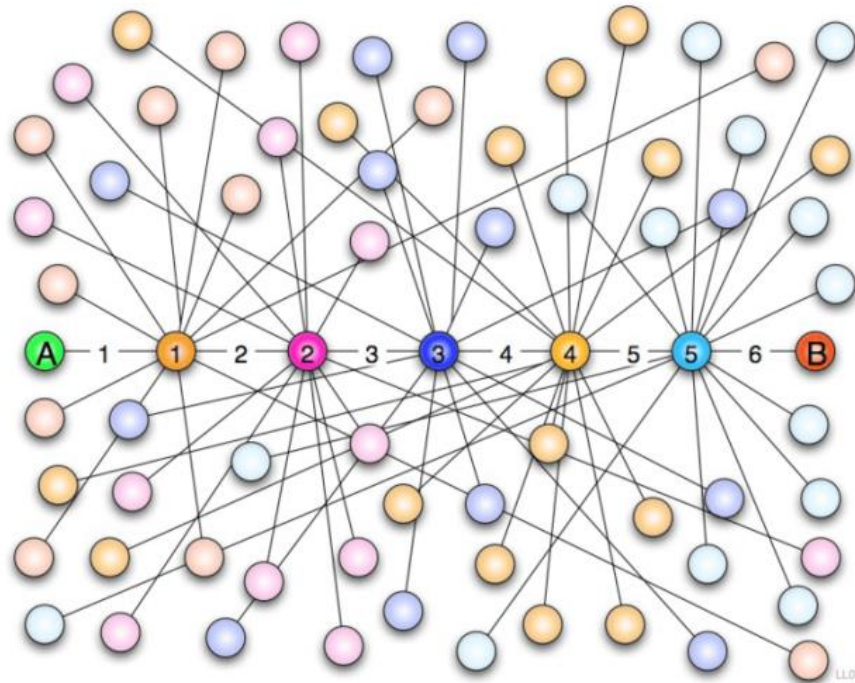
Image 7: "Connectivity or Six Degrees of Separation"

"It's kind of the way that you're able to connect to a huge network of people, then if you become friends with one person you can automatically see just friends of those friends and then you can become friends with their friends, like it's just kind of like a step-wise progression of increasing your social network […] it just provides, it's so much faster, it's so much more personal, kind of access to things so much more easily… so [it] helps you to keep in touch a lot." (Naomi)

Second, thanks to the fast pace of social media, people can communicate and interact instantly. When Carrie wishes to spread good news about herself to her friends and acquaintances, she is able to reach people instantly with the update, as she describes:

"You can put posts up really, really fast. I'll check my newsfeed, twenty minutes later, there's a ton of new things on it, it's a really fast way to get information out there, so if I

want everyone to know about my internship, I'm graduating, I post it, people are liking it,
making posts on it within 5 minutes 30 people knew that I graduated, way faster than if I
get the phone and text people. It's just getting information out really fast." (Carrie)

3.3. The Metaphor of Control

3.3.1. Controlling Behaviors on the Space of Social Media

The perception of control emerges in informants' experiences on the social media space. Occasionally, they mention feeling in good control over situations, but at other times, they report lacking an important sense of control which can impact their behavior.

3.3.1.1. Exerting Control

The large exposure of information on the space of social media leaves consumers in fear of their privacy and personal image. Social media might be transforming the whole meaning of the concept of privacy. Consumers feel uncovered and exposed. Hence, they express their need to have control over their privacy and their personal image online. For Audrey, social media represents a deep risk to her privacy. Audrey fears that her identity, her personal information, and her personal image may all be in jeopardy because of social media. Thus, she feels the need to always protect herself. In the Image 8 below, we find the image of a mouse reaching for a cheese, about to get caught in a mouse trap. Audrey represents herself as a little mouse in fear trying to access social media (the cheese). She describes the actions she takes in her attempt to protect herself on social media, hence the mouse's helmet. Her way of controlling her privacy includes creating an extremely safe password which nobody knows, not even her husband, as well as learning to use privacy settings effectively. With her efforts, Audrey believes she can control about 80% of the risk, as she explains in the following quote:

Image 8: "Risk"

"R: Why does this [image] illustrate social media for you?

I: So, for me it illustrates social media because it's a mouse with a 'casque' [helmet] meaning that it's good going on social media, but you have to be prepared [giggles]. [...] you have to protect yourself. You have to know how to use the privacy settings and limit the risk. [...] You have to protect your personal information. I mean if you put your address or email on Facebook, you have to make sure nobody is stealing it. You have to try to control the pictures that are posted about you. So, you have to manage your risk, but you cannot, you cannot... control everything, but you can try to control let's say, I don't know, 80% of the risk. [...]

R: What is that risk?

I: Risk of having your personal information robbed, someone can take your identity. [...] That's why you have to protect yourself by making friends' groups, by making [a] very, very difficult password almost impossible to imagine! I'm doing that, I'm doing [a] very, very, very difficult password. You wouldn't find it, even my husband [laughs]. [...] I know that by being on Facebook, I'm like exposing myself to risk, I hope nothing will happen, that's why I'm posting less pictures or no picture." (Audrey)

Moreover, consumers control their privacy on the space of social media for very personal reasons. For instance, due to his homosexuality, Samuel wishes to control his activity on social media. In the following citation, the informant describes how he actively controls his posts on Facebook, because of this:

> *"R: Why don't you post? You said you post sometimes [only]?*
>
> *I: Yeah, it's very rare that I post. The reason why I don't post is because um… I don't have a lot of… I have a, well I mean, I have… OK so I'll give you the honest answer […] because my Facebook friends are so diverse, like I said, my great aunt is on Facebook and at the same time my family, some of my mom's friends that I'm not close to are on there, and at the same time I have my friends, and my circles of friends and so on, and as you know I'm a gay man so I have a lot of gay friends on there as well. So, out of respect for my mother, because of my cultural background and where I come from […] because of that I'd rather not share opinions of things that might offend one group over another." (Samuel)*

In addition, as Charlotte went through a divorce, she decided to control her activity and her friend's list on the space of Facebook in an attempt to protect her privacy. Hence, in the following quote, she explains her way of exerting control on social media as she only accepts a limited amount of friends and controls what people can see about her:

> *"R: Who do you have on Facebook, is it your friends?*
>
> *I: Um, yeah, I have the restrictions pretty tight, um… so I only do friends. […] Um… only my friends can see pictures and everything, and you know sometimes people block that you can't see this but you can still see this, so I've got a block that you can't even see this, and it took a while 'cause I had to go up in this and then you can click and see how other people would see it, and so I took care of all of that. I have some… you know, my ex… I had a divorce, and I made sure that that kind of things are blocked 'cause I didn't wanna be seen there." (Charlotte)*

3.3.1.2. Lacking Control

3.3.1.2.1. Lacking Control over Privacy and Image

Consumers' exercise of control over their privacy on the space of social media was shown previously. However, consumers actually sometimes feel a deep challenge and helplessness in relation to their control. In order to control their image and their privacy, informants mention how they need to make decisions on a daily basis on whether or not to reveal information on social media. Albert illustrates this notion of challenging mind tasks which leave him to feel anxious about his social media exposures as he explains:

> *"I find myself a very public person, and at the same time, a very private person. I think that this gap is why I'm anxious [clicking on his coffee mug, thinking]… I can't make the best of the two worlds." (Albert)*

Moreover, in his image "Positioning" (Image 9 below), Albert describes his feeling of anxiety related to not being able to control his own image. Albert feels anxious about the fact that people may form an idea about him, which may be the wrong one or not the one he desires it to be. He explains that his lack of control emerges from the fact that there are too many things to control on social media, and it is simply not possible to control them all:

Image 9: "Positioning"

"I: You want to control the image people have of you rather than letting other people to decide that for you, you know?

R: Yes. And do you have a feeling or a perception about this?

I: [Sigh] Yes, anxiety. Because there are a lot of factors that you have to control and honestly, you're not powerful enough." (Albert)

3.3.1.2.2. Lacking Control over the Immensity of Information

As informants reported lacking control over their privacy and image online, they additionally describe lacking control over the immense amount of information present on the social media space. Social media is represented as an area filled with an enormous volume of data, and when consumers search for information, they report feeling disoriented and out of control. With his image "Too Much Information" (Image 10 below), Tim presents numerous images lined one by one, and within each image is included another dimension of images. This powerful representation of the immensity of information makes us grasp Tim's feeling of losing control. Indeed, Tim describes in the following quote how his frequent search for information is most often ineffective. His search gives him stress and anxiety as he discusses how he often simply can't find the piece of information he was looking for.

Image 10: "Too Much Information"

"I: This just represents that, because there's so much and each one has its own depth of color, and idea, and concept that it's just hard to um… hard to decide for the signal from the noise. These are all different images and they're all in one image, and it's hard to see, you know, is this the image that would be of interest to me, or is this the one? […]

R: You often feel this when you go online?

I: Yes. […]

R: How does that make you feel?

I: Sometimes it makes me feel anxious.

R: Anxious?

I: Yeah. Sometimes it makes me feel depressed. You can't stay on top of all them.

R: Anxious in what way?

I: That there's something out there that I missed that I needed to see that I didn't see."

(Tim)

Informants lack control over searching for information in an area filled with an immensity of data. This lack of control actually originates from two important elements. In the following Image 11 and citation of Tim, he first mentions that the data present on the space of social media is one of contributed knowledge from an immense amount of people. For Tim's search for information, this contributed content can be negative. As he refers to the saying "too many cooks spoil the broth" to describe his feeling about this matter, Tim explains in his following citation how effort originating from too many cooks or contributors can often result in a tasteless or worthless outcome.

Image 11: "Too Many Cooks"

"There's a saying which is 'too many cooks spoil the broth' if you've never heard that saying, what it means is, if you have too many people, so the concept is, if you have too many cooks adding things into a soup, it can make for a bad soup 'cause they don't work as well, the spoil, yes. So, too many cooks spoil the broth means too many people adding into something can make the thing not be good anymore." (Tim)

As explained, Tim's negative perception of the content created on social media adds to his ineffective search for information. Additionally, through his following image "Barren Wasteland" (Image 12 below), Tim explains how, because of the amount of worthless information on social media or as he calls it "dirt", he is left with a big challenge to find valuable information. As he describes his image in the following quote, he presents the space of social media as a large desert with a lot of dirt or soil around. On this vast area, we find one animal walking. For Tim, that small animal represents a piece of information which might be interesting. However, it is difficult to find it in the big pile of dust. Through this description, a second important factor for Tim's lack of control emerges: the large amount of useless or dull information found on social media.

Image 12: "Barren Wasteland"

"There really is dirt and not much, not much of real value. It goes back to that 'Too Many Cooks' thing where if you look at YouTube there are, for me personally I might find a hundred videos that are really interesting like the Ted Talks for instance that you may be aware of, technical or very interesting educational whatever valuable videos, and for every hundred there's probably a billion, literally, a billion that are [laughs] you know, Gangnam Style or um… what's the latest meme there? I can't think of the name of it, where the

people dance… anyway. You know, the sort of things that are on YouTube that are of less
intellectual value, of less even social value, so to me that means that this represents that
way. There's one interesting thing and a ton of other stuff." (Tim)

3.3.1.2.3. Lacking Control over Learning Social Media

Consumers lack control over their privacy and over the immensity of data on social media. Additionally, they report lacking control over learning social media. A loss of control can originate from a lack of knowledge and skill (Zaltman & Zaltman, 2008). Social media is evolving at a rapid pace, and keeping up with it requires consumers to do some learning. For some, this can be challenging and overwhelming. Informants express the feeling of lacking control over this learning and keeping up-to-date process. Some mention interest in learning, while others make informed decisions to refuse learning additional applications or platforms of social media. For instance, Charlotte finds it difficult to keep up with learning new social media platforms. When Charlotte's daughter showed her the platform of Pinterest and recommended that she learns how to use it, Charlotte refused. A reason for her refusal is that Pinterest is not intuitive for her. In addition, Charlotte refused to learn about Twitter and the use of hashtags. At her work place, the Marketing department gave them information about promoting the company through the use of hashtags. Charlotte mentioned that she was utterly confused, and is simply not interested in understanding the hashtags. In fact, Charlotte believes that with age, interest for learning things can be diminished. She is 60 years old, and she explains how she simply does not have the will, interest and ability to learn additional social media tools and applications. With her description of the Image 13 found below, we sense Charlotte's deep lack of control emerging from her overwhelm to learn about Pinterest, and her description of her limited "bandwidth" or tolerance of information in relation to her age:
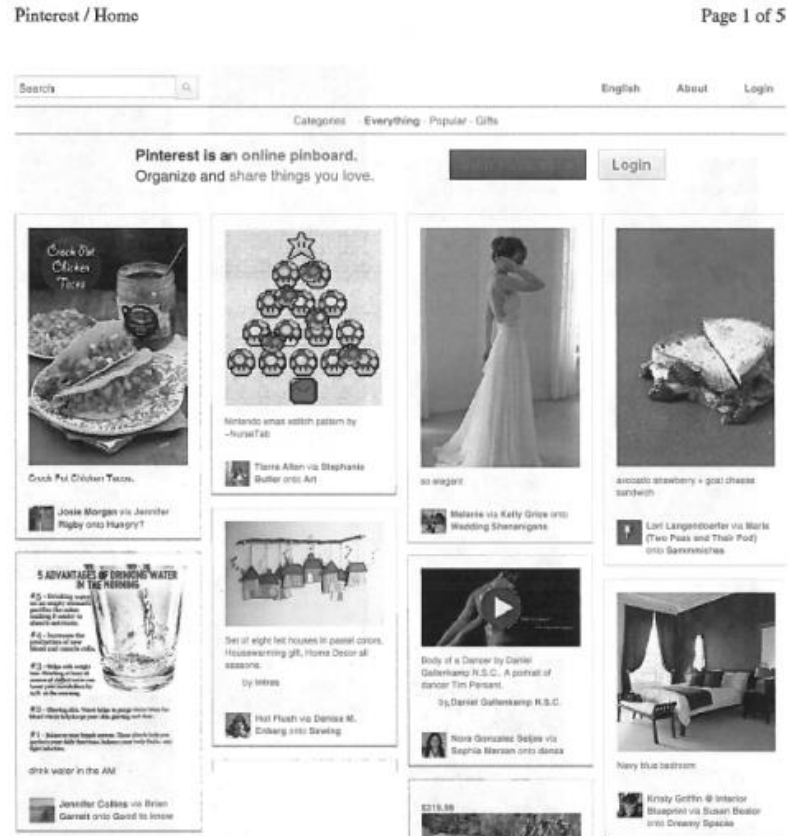
Image 13: "How the Internet Can Be Overwhelming"

"I mean look at all of this stuff! But I… you know, put it in because I just… this is overwhelming to me. It's just too much information. It's… I don't know how to navigate… I clicked in here and there, and it's not intuitively obvious to me about how I would engage, um… it's… it's… this is how the Internet can be overwhelming to me. […] To each our own in terms of our ability to manage the amount of data that can come at you at any given time. You know, if I was able to multitask and be as interested in the world as my daughter is, I would be using Pinterest and I'd be on a Twitter feed with 3 or 4 people or 12 people that I was interested in. It's just that's where generational things come up I think, it's that, total my opinion, that as you get older, your bandwidth for the amount of noise and information you can manage and tolerate gets a little more narrow. […] The hashtag, I mean every now and then they'll write 'we got a hashtag' and I'm like, 'what? I have no idea of this!' So, unlike something that will come to the future which I have no interest in, this is what I have no understanding of. This…

R: You don't know the hashtag?

I: Oooh no! I don't. I don't do that. I don't have a Twitter feed, and when I get my new phone this week, this coming week, we will not put Twitter on there!" (Charlotte)

Moreover, Elaine, who is 51 years old, additionally explains her lack of knowledge and ease when it comes to learning social media. Learning social media gives her stress and the feeling of lacking control. Unlike Charlotte who mentioned a lack of interest in learning, Elaine tries to learn but quickly gives up. She explains her frequent "block" when she is trying to search for information on social media as she describes her non-use of the platform of Craig's List:

"I don't go on it, but I know what it is. It's a way of finding specialties, bargains, comparisons, because you could go on Craig's List and see, 'oh ok this is how much this person is giving for the same product or similar product', you could compare prices and you can find classified things, jobs, or interviews. This is an example of what's on there. I don't use it, but this is just an example and my perception is Craig's List. […] I just find that every time I go somewhere there's a block, there's always a block and it takes me too much time, I just give up. […] I don't use it because I hate searching for things [laughs]. It's very time consuming, it's very… You have to put certain words to go in there and 'OK this is what I want'." (Elaine)

3.3.2. The Relationship between Time and Control on Social Media

3.3.2.1. Controlling the Use of Social Media and Saving Time

Consumers often mention the notion of time in relation to their social media usage. They explain their need to control their own use of social media, because it can negatively impact their time. Audrey describes the relationship between time and her use of social media as she explains that she has made an informed decision to control her own use of social media. She believes that social media can become an addiction which can cause people to waste their time. However, Audrey has set her own rules to avoid her temptation to stay on social media for hours. For instance, she has decided to never use Facebook at work. She only uses it at lunch time, and when she gets back home after work. In this way, Audrey feels that she is positively controlling her time, and saving it for more productive things. Her following quote demonstrates the discipline she has created for herself in order to control her temptation:

"R: What do you do online?

I: I'm going on Facebook, like let's say once a day, no more. Once a day. [...]

R: Why did you say 'Facebook once a day, no more'?

I: Because it's addictive. I know that… I mean, a few years ago when I arrived here, I had a closed office so I had privacy in my office and now I'm in an open stuff, it's different. And so, before I know I was staying on Facebook, you know a friend is sending you bla bla bla bla, and it's 15 minutes, 30 minutes, and you're at work and you're not working. So, I don't want to use Facebook at work because it's not very productive. I'm using Facebook on the lunch time and that's it, and sometimes when I come back home, but not when I'm working. I don't want.

R: You decided?

I: Yeah, I decided. I can, but I don't want. I can, I'm allowed to, but I don't want. Because I know I'm gonna stay on it, because I'm gonna see 'ahh my friend did that OK'! [giggles]

R: How do you feel about this addictive aspect of Facebook?

I: Me I'm comfortable with that because I can manage myself [...] I'm restraining myself a bit, it's volunteer." (Audrey)

3.3.2.2. Lacking Control on Social Media and Losing Time

Furthermore, in some cases, consumers lose control over their social media usage, and thus lose or waste their time. Contrarily to Audrey who felt in control of her own created discipline, other informants remain challenged in their ability to control their social media usage. Losing control can emerge from the fact of lacking willpower and self-discipline (Zaltman & Zaltman, 2008). Technology can greatly impact the perception and act of control. It can give consumers a sense of control, while at the same time, it can take away control over from their lives as they perceive that their time is flying away (Zaltman & Zaltman, 2008). When things become tempting and create dependence, individuals' perceptions of control and time are impacted (Zaltman & Zaltman, 2008). Indeed, informants mention their feeling of losing and wasting time due to their lack of control

over using social media. Lacking control on a social media platform often translates into addiction, which sometimes leads to extreme reactions. For instance, consumers might decide to completely delete their accounts on certain platforms.

Different consumers lack control over different social mediums, and thus lose their time. Generally, this loss of time is associated with the perception that the activity on the medium itself is unproductive. For instance, Samuel and Jerry mention their waste of time using different platforms of social media. For Samuel, his loss of time is due to an overuse of the application Grindr on his phone. Grindr is an all-male location-based mobile social network for gay, bisexual, or curious guys to communicate or meet (Grindr.com). Samuel explains that his use of Grindr is generally unrewarding, and *"number one (a) waste of time".* According to him, his communications on Grindr are very repetitive, and *"9 out of 10 times people chicken out"* rather than actually meeting. Like Samuel, Jerry feels a lack of control over his use of Facebook. Both informants mention their will to completely delete their accounts (Grindr for Samuel, Facebook for Jerry). Jerry's perception of losing his time related to seeing other people's lives being "productive" on Facebook. Seeing other people being productive gives Jerry the feeling that he is not, and that he should be using his time more wisely. We notice how Jerry believes that reading news represents an activity that is more rewarding than watching people on Facebook. Jerry feels bothered by this and mentions how he would feel liberated if he could delete his account on Facebook to use his time in a better way, as he describes in the following quote:

> *"I: I hate Facebook I wanna delete my account […] I'm never gonna actually get rid of it but I know I should 'cause it just wastes a lot of time […] If I got rid of it, it would be like liberating [giggles]*
>
> *R: So, liberating if you get rid of it?*
>
> *I: Yeah but I probably won't, 'cause I still use it to communicate with people, but I'm always like 'yeah I wanna delete Facebook' […]*
>
> *R: May I ask you why you would like to delete it?*
>
> *I: Because I waste a lot of time on it and 'cause you feel like you're like… I don't know you feel like you're being unproduc… first of all, you see everyone else being productive in life,*

and you're just kind of like yeah… they just did this, they just did that, and I'm sitting in my office bored out of my a**, but like you know, just like… that sort of thing. But also like, it's just a time waster, and like certain other… its harder to justify wasting your time on Facebook than it would be to waste your time reading the news or… doing something productive in life […] And like, when I start bar school, I'm gonna be very limited in my free time… And like, I feel like I don't wanna use my free time being on Facebook, I'd rather go biking or something. I just fixed my bike, so… yeah." (Jerry)

3.3.3. The Relationship between Speed and Control on Social Media

3.3.3.1. Lacking Control over the Speed of Social Media

Another aspect of social media which makes consumers lack control is its fast pace. Social media is so fast that it represents unpredictability. With the Image 14 of "The Future that Never Happened" found below, Tim presents what people thought the future (now) would look like. We notice monorails on highways, which don't exist now. With this image, Tim illustrates the unpredictability of social media all due to its intensely rapid speed. Because it is so unstable and volatile, Tim senses that he can never be prepared for social media and what is coming. He will never be able to predict and control social media. Tim finds this lack of control to be challenging for him, because he simply doesn't know what the future with social media will look like, and will never be ready for it in advance, as he describes in the following quote:

Image 14: "The Future that Never Happened"

"I: It's a picture of the future from the past, so it's a picture of what one thought the future would look like in the past, and… it's I guess the future that never happened. […] So, this picture represents… this is what 50 years ago people thought it would look like now and it doesn't look like this now: we don't have monorails everywhere, and it doesn't have a flying car. It's not what you thought it was going to be. It always ends up being something a little different than what you thought it was going to be. […]

R: Why does social media make you think of this?

I: Because I think um… it's hard because it changes so fast. You know, Twitter really hasn't been around that long… what four years? Five years Twitter maybe? But when it first becomes… when any of these things first become popular, people talk about how it's going to change everything […] Very often it's people have this broad vision of how things are going to change because it rarely is exactly what you think, and social media I think is that way, and people talk about it a lot, how it's changing everything and it probably is, but it's

probably not changing it in the way people think. It's always going to be something

different. […]

R: You said social media changes so fast. How do you feel about that?

I: […] I mean, I think… it's, it's difficult to, um… it's difficult to control what I just said there,
it's difficult to control how you use it and how it gets used, because things change so fast
and how people use things changes fast. What vehicles people use today are Facebook and
Twitter, but 5 years ago it wasn't, 5 years from now it could be something else, and to stay
on top of those things it is very hard." (Tim).

3.4. The Metaphor of Resource

3.4.1. The Social Media Space as a Resource

3.4.1.1. Social Media as a Life Organizer

Accessing the social media space has become fundamental for basic life planning and organization.
For Cecilia, connecting to social media through her phone is the first thing she does when she
wakes up in the morning. On her phone, she is able to check her emails, her messages on
Facebook, and the news. Most importantly, she is able to view everything she needs to know and
do for the day. Cecilia's access to social media is important to her because of her baking business.
As she checks her phone in the morning, applications notify her of any cake orders of the day, so
she can plan her day accordingly. In this way, her access to social media is crucial to her everyday
life. She has become reliant on the device (which represents social media to her) to notify her on
what to do, and at what time of the day. In the Image 15 called "The Wake-up Call" and quote, we
understand how social media has taken a new essential role in the routine life of Cecilia:

Image 15: "The Wake-up Call"

"I: So basically I wake up, my alarm is on my phone, and as soon as I wake up I check my emails, I check Facebook, sometimes people I know post news on Facebook and I can follow with that. Um… I check all the new deals, and throughout the day I follow basically what's happening. […]

R: Why would you call it 'The Wake-up Call'?

I: 'Cause my phone is my alarm [giggles]… and I have everything on it, absolutely everything, my agenda… my alarm, like I said, what I need to do throughout the day… Everything.

R: What do you put on your agenda for instance?

I: Say uh… I have cake orders, it tells me when I should start and I can plan it like that. […] I write down all the orders I get and I mark for which day it is and I put it like a day in advance it gives me a little alarm, like this I know when to start." (Cecilia)

3.4.1.2. Social Media as a Resource for Business

3.4.1.2.1. Networking

Consumers perceive social media as a great resource for business networking. As seen previously through the lens of the metaphor of connection, social media was represented as a great tool to connect with individuals by allowing an augmented reach and accessibility to people. In this case, social media platforms additionally symbolize great resources for reaching business connections.

First, LinkedIn is represented by consumers as a confidence booster for job search. LinkedIn and its accessibility to business connections represent a significant opportunity for Audrey to be visible to professionals for her career, something she greatly values. Audrey highly cares about her LinkedIn profile, and manages it carefully as she explains that it is 100% completed. With the Image 16 below entitled "Opportunity", Audrey explains that she was once offered a job through LinkedIn. The informant describes her feelings of great happiness and increased self-confidence that she got through this job offer in the following quote:

Image 16: "Opportunity"

"I: I mean, through LinkedIn I already received some offers, job offers, I've been like hunted [giggles]. So I already received some job offers like: 'Can I contact you? I'm interested, bla bla bla'. So, I never used it... 'thank you I'm not interested', but it's a good thing, it could be helpful. It's a way to be visible on the web, professionally speaking I mean, and so my

LinkedIn profile is almost 100% complete! [laughs]. Yeah so it's a way to be visible […] if LinkedIn did not exist, I wouldn't be visible for head hunters. So for that aspect, LinkedIn is like… unique for me because I would not have another way to be visible on the web. […]

R: Let's say there was no LinkedIn, how would you feel?

I: […] Perhaps I would feel like… alone, alone in the sense that I wouldn't be visible and I wouldn't know how to contact that kind of hunting companies. And, I wouldn't have the feeling of being interesting, because when you're receiving an email from a hunting company you feel like: 'oh my profile is not so bad! They're calling me and they want to offer me a job!' So it makes me feel happy and proud of myself because someone is interested in my CV. So, yeah proud of myself I would say." (Audrey)

Moreover, consumers believe LinkedIn to be a crucial tool in their job search. There are reasons behind the importance of meeting potential work contacts through LinkedIn. In the Image 17 called "The Network", Tim is delighted to show a visual network of his connections built through LinkedIn. Tim's connection to work contacts is so important to him for different reasons. In his discourse, Tim mentions that he was unemployed during the last year. As his work consists of doing mentoring for business start-ups, he describes how his networking on LinkedIn highly facilitated his job search. In the following quote, Tim explains why LinkedIn as a space of connectivity was fundamental to him:
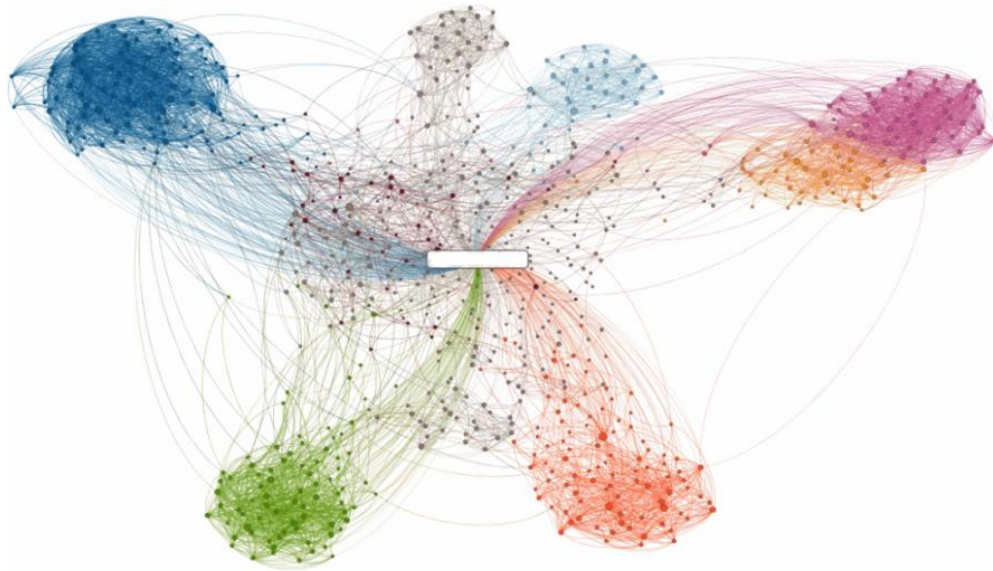
Image 17: "The Network"

"So, I don't know if you… so that's my name in the middle there, and this is actually a tool that, an app on LinkedIn, which allows you to create a visual network of your connections. And it's actually a fascinating tool. […]

R: What is the importance of the Internet for you? […]

I: It's pretty much the way that I do my networking, connect with people, find people that do things I might be interested in, or who might be interested in what I can do. Yeah… I spent the last year, 2012, essentially unemployed, but I did a lot of consulting. The only way to do the connecting was through the Internet, using all the tools, LinkedIn, Twitter […] So, I think for professionally, I think LinkedIn and Twitter… Twitter I feel similar to Facebook, like if it went away tomorrow I would probably still be able to do a lot of what I do, but LinkedIn I feel um… having now twice done job search since LinkedIn has come into existence, I've twice gone on the job search, once looking for a better opportunity than what I had and then once looking for a job when I was unemployed […] the networking I did through LinkedIn was constructive." (Tim)

3.4.1.2.2. Self-Promotion

In addition to being a resource for business networking, social media is represented as a great tool for self-promotion for one's career. The metaphor of connection emerges in this aspect of social media permitting a massive reach to people, which evidently benefits promotion. Different platforms and features of social media are associated with the opportunity of self-promotion.

First, informants reveal the general concept of promotion of personal ideas via social media. Tim believes that the social media space is a great resource to promote thoughts and ideas, which can help individuals build positive images of themselves for their careers. When discussing the concept of "crowdsourcing" with the Image 18 found below, Tim has in mind his own image for his career. In the following quote, Tim explains how he shared ideas on social media and gained popularity easily, which assisted him in showing his interests to others who might be attracted to his work:
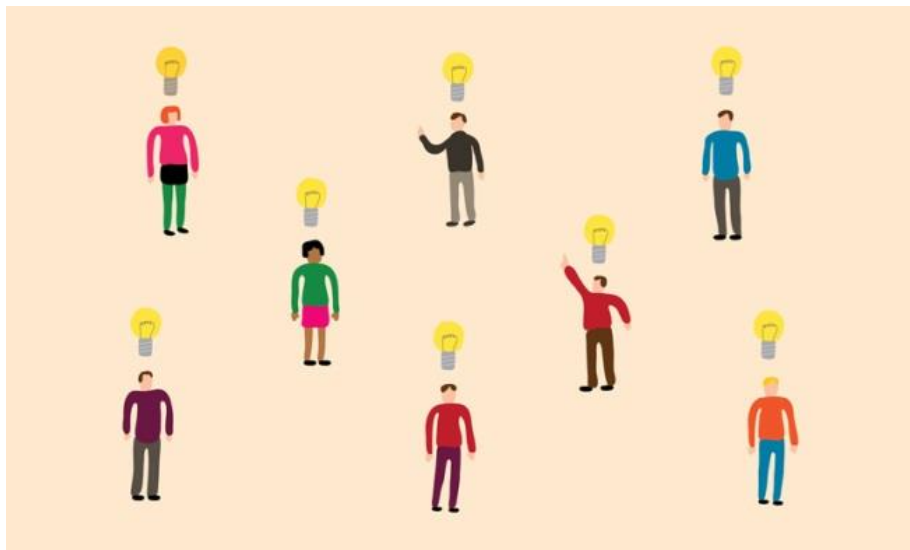
Image 18: "Crowdsourcing"

"I: So, one of the things that I think happens with social media is someone, one person, might present an idea that somebody, or someone will find something that they think is a good idea, and put it in social media in some way, tweet about it, goes on Facebook, and other people will, who think it's also a good idea will do the same and repeat that idea and in a way that, call it a medium, call it whatever you wanna call it, and this picture captures that for me because of the light bulb, and many people with the idea. Many people sort of sharing and re-sharing the idea. [...]

R: Did this ever happen to you, you posted an idea and it was shared?

I: […] One of the things that I did last year while I was trying to network more professionally is I would actively post, re-post things that I found interesting reading on the Internet

R: You would re-post?

I: I would re-post on LinkedIn, and then other people might share them or I might re-post or post it on Twitter and other people would share that, and I used that as a way to get people to notice that I had interesting ideas or interests." (Tim)

Secondly, consumers expose information about the platform of Pinterest for the purpose of promoting personal skills. Elaine discusses the potential of advertising one's skills by reaching a large public on Pinterest, as she explains:

"People pin different things on it, it's very artistic and you get really good ideas, hair designs. And, at the same time, I think people are also advertising on this, and I find a lot of good ideas and good images on this [platform]. […] I think the purpose of it is to… there are a lot of artistic people out there that are trying to say: 'OK I can do this. This is my design.' And, also to bring business, it's also a business proposition. […] It shows a lot of people, it's a way of getting attention. It's a way of advertising to more than one person. I mean there are a lot of people with different interests that go into the site." (Elaine)

Thirdly, informants present the opportunity of self-presentation and self-promotion through the use of podcasts. In his representation of social media in the form of podcasts, Jerry explains how podcasts give a great opportunity to individuals to present their ideas to the world easily and conveniently. In his explanation, Jerry distinguishes podcasts and traditional news. According to him, podcasts represent social media more than simple news, because they offer everyone the chance to promote or present themselves to the world, rather than being told what to believe (like traditional news do), as he describes in the following citation accompanied by the Image 19:

Image 19: "Podcast Keith and the Girl"

"This is literally two people that decided to go on, you know record themselves for two hours and let people listen to them talk, and then people can communicate back and forth on, you know, blogs and forums and stuff. But like, to me, that's a perfect example of social media, where someone just decides to record themselves and you know, let other people listen to it [...]

R: Why do you feel that this one [podcast] is more social media [than news]?

I: It's more social media in the sense that… to me, I see social media as… as opposed to regular media, in the sense that it allows people that otherwise wouldn't have access to… to like express themselves to the public, and this gives them the opportunity to do so. Whereas, if I'm listening to the news, they can still convey it to me some other way, if they don't have a podcast I can still listen to it or I can still see what they wanna tell me. Whereas, if I'm an individual and I wanna present something, the podcast that's like what you use to present yourself on a wider scale." (Jerry)

3.4.1.3. Social Media as an Empowering Resource

3.4.1.3.1. Self-Expression

Social media empowers consumers in different ways. Informants expose evidence on the power of self-expression provided on the social media space. They label the world with social media as a democratic world in which people have a great opportunity to express themselves. According to

them, features that are specific to social media make it favorable to the freedom of expression. For instance, consumers discuss how the distance and the perceived anonymity provided through the space of social media definitely contribute to the ease of expressing themselves freely, without being afraid of consequences. They explain how voicing ideas on social media is like having a shield of protection. Thus, they believe that the space of social media makes it favorable to discuss any topic, even if it is a controversial or emotional one. The representation of social media empowering consumers with freedom of expression gets deeper as consumers mention it to provide great hope to societies. For instance, Albert sees great new opportunities for individuals in the future thanks to social media. When asked to draw an image representing the opposite of social media, Albert draws a dark world trapped in a dictatorship which he calls "Dogma" shown in Image 20 below. According to him, social media distributes power to everybody, and this power is highly valued for society and can make the world a better place. As he explains in the following quote, social media is powerful as it can allow individuals to think as they wish, grow, and believe in their own aspirations, never having to follow someone else's' beliefs and orders:
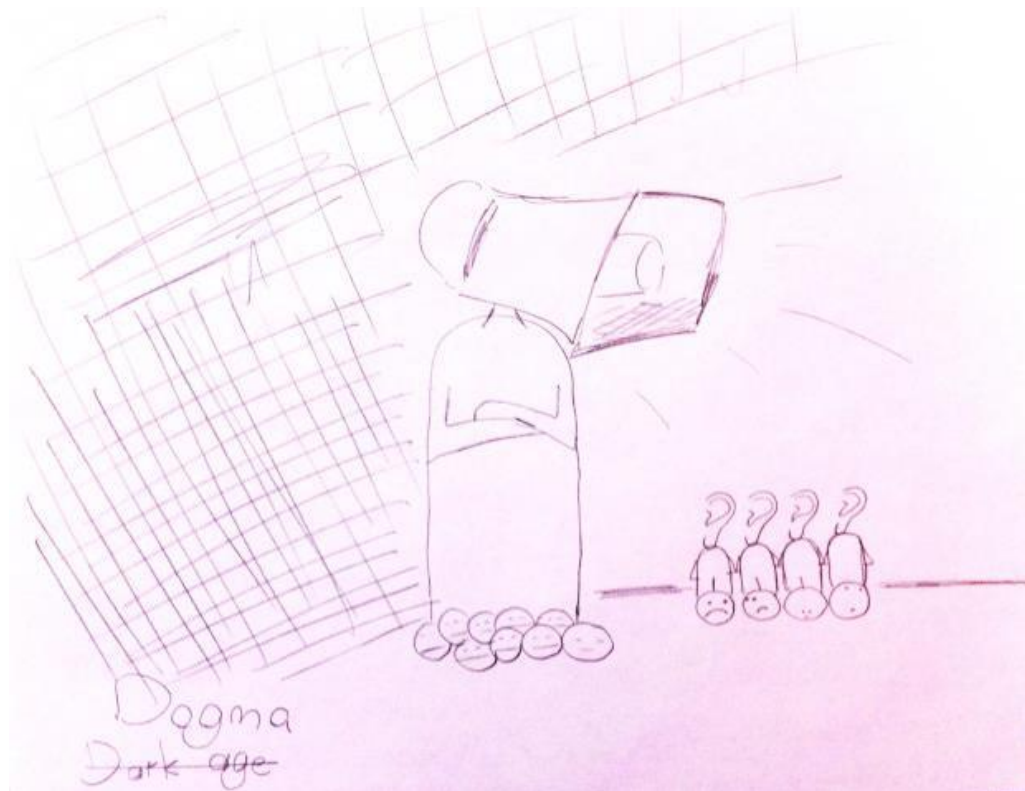

Image 20: "Dogma" (Opposite of Social Media)

"From a body language perspective when you have your hands across your chest, you don't wanna hear, you're in a defensive position. And these are the heads that have been expired, you know? And each of them after some time they will go here, they will join the history, you see? So there is one person really powerful who's telling other people what to do […] This big person. These are other people like these people alright? And these people are listening to him rather than using their heads. They're living other person's life. That's what we call dogma. Dogma! Living another person's life. And this person… and as you can see they're not equal because this is like speaker, these are like ears. He doesn't have a head. He's just a speaker. He doesn't want to listen, he uses other people to become bigger, you know, he doesn't care you know after some time they will go there. And it's dark. […] What social media does is to bring the media to the masses so everyone's idea matters. Now, if you don't have that then there will be one person ruling over the rest. And you will be living your life based on aspirations of another person. No matter good or evil. […] The world used to be dark. It's still a bit dark [in] some places." (Albert)

Moreover, informants speak with intensity about the degree of empowerment of self-expression. Indeed, they believe that their powers of free and open expression provided to them by social media are extremely strong. Jerry's representation of the power of social media is as follows: a consumer with social media in their life is like a super hero with super powers. Like all super heroes, individuals must use their power within a balance. If not, they can get into trouble, as Jerry explains in the following quote with his example of the platform of Wiki Leaks in which confidential information about politicians was exposed and created big problems:

"So… you know how like super hero… Spider Man, the famous quote is: 'with great power comes great responsibility'? So, it's the same thing like, social media's probably the most powerful tool that exists today… But, with such a powerful tool, you still have to be careful of how it's used… so you know like it's great, it's a force for good. Having said that, you still have to be wary that anything powerful can be dangerous as well, and so… [you] gotta be careful with it. You know, you have the limitations like Wiki Leaks, like how much do you wanna have, how much do you wanna have open or like, yes you advocate social media and have an open society, does that mean there are no limits on what can or can't be… you know discussed or brought on to social media?" (Jerry)

3.4.1.3.2. Enrichment

A second source of empowerment through the social media space is the enrichment it provides to individuals. Consumers feel empowered with new opportunities of discovery, learning, and personal improvement. Different social media platforms are associated with individual enrichment. For instance, the use of Google for learning recipes, and the use of Pinterest to learn new techniques of clothing are mentioned by Elaine in the following quote:

> *"Fashion, hair designs, there's everything, there's too much, or even like we call it the designs for wedding ideas, I mean like little make-match that we don't think of doing but it's very simple to do. […] The other day we went into this site and it shows you how to make a bra into a bikini. […] it's a learning tool." (Elaine)*

In addition, the platform of YouTube is highly associated with learning and the discovery of new things. Audrey brings an image of the desert to represent her infinite possibilities to discover and learn new things on social media shown in Image 21 below. Audrey feels very privileged to have the chance to discover whatever she wants at any time she likes thanks to social media. She specifies her use of YouTube for this concept of discovery. For example, Audrey would use YouTube to get tips on how to renovate an apartment. Audrey works in change management. In her discussion about the infinite possibilities, she also refers to finding out about other companies' ways on social media, which allows her to get benchmarks, and may help her to better advance and improve herself. As the informant speaks in the following quote, there is an intensity of excitement about her empowerment through social media:

Image 21: "Discovery"

"I: It's the desert. I like the desert because I grew up in Africa, that's why! Discovery because… it's like you have the world in front of you and you can discover anything and anyone. You can find information [on] various information on any subject very easily, in 5 minutes. So you can discover many things. I don't know if I have an example… Yeah, for example, on YouTube you have many videos on how to do bla bla bla… videos user guide. So, it's very useful but it's not that I wanna say… um… I forgot my idea. Um… you know when you want to renovate something in the apartment, for example? You can find information [on] how to renovate that furniture. So, you can watch the video, so you can learn a lot of stuff very easily. […] It's fantastic to be able to watch videos from everywhere in the world, even for leisure… my job, I mean I'm working in change management fields, I can see how change management companies in other countries are doing there, their videos, how they're representing themselves. It's very interesting. It's like a huge benchmarking database." (Audrey)

Finally, social media allows consumer enrichment with information obtained through e-word of mouth on reviewing sites. Individuals have the chance to easily get informed with advice and product reviews from other consumers. Charlotte loves to use the platforms of Trip Advisor and Yelp to learn about the good places to try or go to. Charlotte explains how getting reviews and opinions from a large number of people highly enriches her and her life choices as it provides

clarity on what is best and gives her a complete view of opinions. In her description of her use of the two platforms, Charlotte expresses great satisfaction as a consumer:

> *"Trip Advisor [I use it] globally. […] It's really awesome. I always use that site. I think it's got good feedback, it's got good suggestions, and I think this is what social media is about. You know, 400 people who talk about this place in Cancun, it's great, and I got all of these opinions so I'm getting a real view of it. Yelp, I also use locally all the time and I love it to look for places to eat, nearest train stations. It's really, really good." (Charlotte)*

3.4.2. Social Media as a Time Saving Resource

In many ways, the social media space represents a convenient resource to save time. Consumers feel that their space on social media is infinite, and yet constricted as it provides them with everything they need.

Two concepts are key to this idea. First, informants mention how they access a space in which they have a grouping of all their connections. Audrey uses Facebook and LinkedIn to organize events with her contacts. She loves the convenient aspect of having all her contacts in one place. In this way, she organizes everything better, she can "manage" her contacts, and thus save time. For Audrey, the social media space represents a "database". Without social media platforms, Audrey would find it difficult and time-consuming to group her contacts and plan events like she likes to do, as she describes in the following quote:

> *"It's very useful, it's um… it allows me to manage all these people easily, again it's kind of like a database. They're all my professional contacts. They're all in the same place. So, when I wanna send a message I don't have to send an email to 50 or 60 people, I just have to do a post on LinkedIn, it's one big group and it takes me like 1 or 2 minutes instead of perhaps… I don't know, 1 hour. So, it's reducing my working time. […] It's a way to also keep a record of your friends. It's like a database for me, database of your friends." (Audrey)*

Second, informants explain how they access an integrated space on social media. Carrie enjoys the convenient aspect of having synced or integrated platforms of social media, such as her Gmail account and her Google Calendar. Going in just one space where everything is synced together is

convenient for Carrie and allows her to save time and energy. She feels a great flexibility. She can move around quickly and in a facilitated fashion, as she explains in the following quote:

"I: My email, so I've got access to Gmail through that, I can stay logged in the same one and I can log in to my Google Documents, I can go to Google+, it's all just linked in the same thing, so I'm not using several different ones, it's all in the same account and I can move around easily.

R: How do you feel about this?

I: I like this a lot. Google Calendar is the one I use all the time. I'm constantly on Google Calendar, something I use all the time. It syncs into my email. For example, if I get an email about an appointment, there's a link probably with the date and a time and I can click on that and create an event in my calendar, so I just really like how everything kind of works together basically." (Carrie)

3.4.3. Social Media as a Resource for Instantaneous Information

Informants represent the world of social media as one with an intensely fast pace. Due to its rapid speed, social media is a constant and immediate source of information.

The fast pace of social media has become an important resource to consumers. In everyday life, consumers have developed an instantaneous awareness about the world thanks to information posted on social media. Jerry expresses his need to always be up-to-date with what is going on in the world. Twitter represents a platform for instantaneous information also known as "live tweeting". Jerry has become an intense consumer of Twitter. The immediate aspect of social media allows Jerry to stay constantly informed. He discusses how the speed at which information arrives and gets updated give him a constant urge to check his Twitter account, which he checks on his phone. Twitter has become a part of Jerry's "essential life". In the following citation and Image 22 of the "Twitter Olympics", Jerry describes the resource of the instantaneity of social media:

Image 22: "Twitter Olympics"

"R: How important is the Internet for you?

I: Very important. I didn't have my cell phone for like two days, 'cause like I have a Blackberry and it broke… it's a long story. The point is, I was dying without my phone. So many people can reach me, but also… It's also to, you know, be able to check my email, and like Twitter… I'm addicted to Twitter […] Twitter, I'm on it all the time. […]

R: Why is Twitter important for you?

I: OK, so, I'm a big nerd. I'm like, I really like the news and politics and that sort of thing […] I get all my news from Twitter, like I follow like every news media outlet, all the politicians, and everything like that. And, I always have to feel like I know what's going on in the world, and Twitter for me is the best way to get that […] To me, Twitter is the 24 hour one. People are tweeting all the time, about everything. And like… you know, you just go on Twitter, and you feel like you're more… you know what's going on almost instantaneously […] Everything that's going on in the Olympics is being tweeted about every second, all the time […] So… yeah, let's put it this way, I'm compelled to check my phone now to check if anything exciting that's happened since we started talking [giggles]. I'm not trying to be rude I'm enjoying this conversation too! [giggles]" (Jerry)

Obtaining information directly and immediately can be very convenient in everyday life. In fact, it can go deeper as to save a person's life. For Elaine, social media represents a "highway to information", shown in Image 23 below. Waiting lines or traffic lights don't exist for consumers of social media. Elaine discusses an example of a young girl posting an important favor on YouTube for the world to see. That girl was sick, and posted about her need for a new kidney. According to Elaine, the instantaneity of social media saved her life, as she describes in the following image and quote:
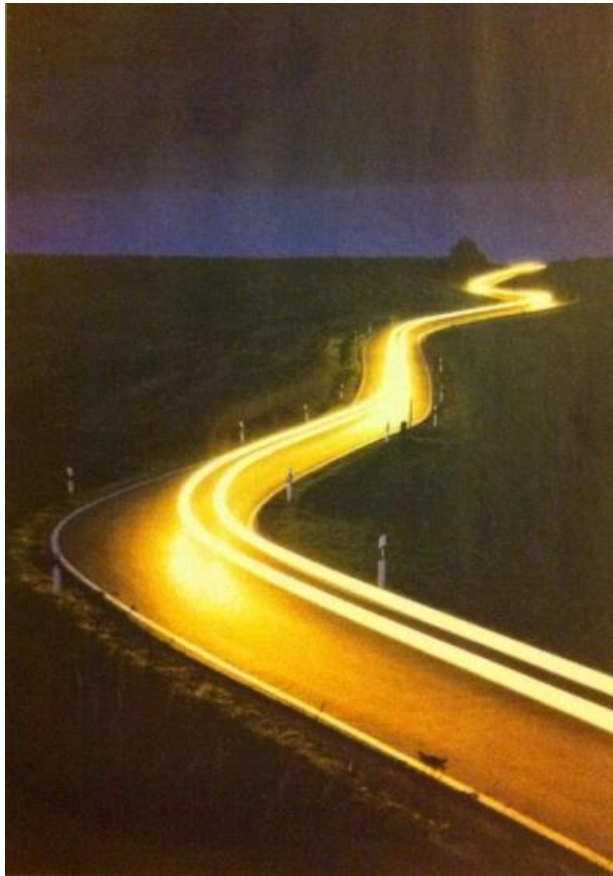
Image 23: "Highway to Information"

"From YouTube you could get news clips of like people looking for a kidney. Like this person I think she put it on YouTube and she got a lot of people to donate to her. She was on Oprah, because she was talking about [how] she was in high school and she had to be at home because she couldn't function, and she got connected and she got that someone, a total stranger, a compatible total stranger that gave her that kidney. There are different

stories from YouTube, like 'oh OK!' That's social media for you, it's a highway to information. […] Technology does save life, and it is a miracle." (Elaine)

Chapter 4 Discussion

After having presented our results, we are now in a position to add knowledge to past literature concerning our research question: what does social media represent to consumers? In the following sections, we will first add knowledge and information concerning the definition of social media, and we will later add insight related to the topics of consumers' goals, feelings, and behaviors associated with social media.

4.1. Concerning the Definition of Social Media

4.1.1. Clarifications on the Multiple Definitions

Past literature has shown a lack of precision to define social media as we found numerous different definitions of the concept (H. Cohen, 2011; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kietzmann et al., 2011). The multiple definitions included different concepts and platforms, as the phenomenon grew over time. Our study allowed us to confirm this lack of precision as we found that different consumers consider social media to be different things. When attempting to define social media, we noticed their difficulty and confusion. Media platforms mentioned were different for everyone. We thus understand that social media is a subjective concept: consumers define it with in mind their own personal purpose and use. An important new result from our study is the fact that informants nowadays equal their mobile phones to social media.

4.1.2. Clarifications on Social Networks vs. Social Media

Academic literature had a strong focus on social networks in its attempt to clarify social media. Researchers often used the terms "social networks" and "social media" interchangeably. However, from our readings, we understood that social networking sites and social media have different definitions and purposes. On social networking sites, users create a public profile and have a list of connections with the aim of building relationships (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Our study enabled us to distinguish between the different kinds of use of social networking sites and other social media platforms. For instance, we were able to grasp knowledge about consumers' involvement with social media with activities such as researching information, getting and giving opinions and

feedback, reading news, and self-promotion. As we notice, these purposes were not related to the goal of connecting with people like on social networking sites specifically. In Table 9 below, we present social networking sites and social media platforms mentioned by informants, and their specific uses, which allows us to better clarify the two terms and how they engage consumers in different ways.

Table 9 Social Networks and Social Media Platforms Mentioned by Informants

Informant	Social Networks (SN)	Purpose	Social Media Platforms (SMP)	Purpose
Carrie	Facebook	Instant updates (communication)	Google Calendar	Reminder for appointments/meetings with people, convenient sync with Gmail and other Google products
			Blogs	Update family/friends about life events (unrewarding activity)
			Gmail	Communication
Naomi	Facebook	Accelerated connectivity with people	iPhone	"Anchor" to social media
Jerry	Facebook	Communication	iPhone	"Gateway" to social media Receive messages 24/7
	Twitter	Constant update on news	Wiki Leaks	Entertainment (politics)
			Podcasts	Self-presentation Self-promotion Self-expression
			Social media in general	Force towards democracy
Cecilia			Phone	Access to social media Alarm Calendar, Reminder Business planning
Albert			Social media in general	Self-expression
			Social media in general	Force towards democracy
			Social	Reach diversity of people

			media in general	
Samuel	**Facebook**	Fulfill curiosity about others (entertainment)		
	WhatsApp	Interact/communicate with friends		
	Grindr	Meet potential dates		
Audrey	**Facebook**	Reunite with old friends Keep up-to-date with friends Database of contacts	**YouTube**	Learn skills Discover things Benchmark to improve herself
	LinkedIn	Visibility to job hunters Database of contacts		
Tim	**LinkedIn**	Connection to business contacts Assistance in job search Self-promotion of ideas for work image	**Ted Talks**	Watch and share interesting videos, interact with users
	Twitter	Self-promotion of ideas for work image		
Charlotte	**Facebook**	Keep track of her daughter Engage with her daughter	**Pinterest**	Does not want to learn/use
	Twitter and hashtags	Does not want to learn/use	**Trip Advisor**	Get opinions and reviews
			Yelp	Get opinions and reviews
Elaine			**Craig's List**	Search for bargains, compare products, forums for jobs (She finds it difficult to use)
			Pinterest	Learn skills Pass-time Self-promotion (potential use)
			Google	Learn cooking recipes posted by consumers
			YouTube	Instantaneous communication with the world

From this table, we are able to show that consumers use the two entities of social networks and social media for different purposes. Contrary to what literature presented with a focus on social networking sites, many other platforms of social media were mentioned by consumers in our research. Some purposes may merge between the two, for instance, communication is done on

Facebook (SN) and on Gmail (SMP), but most frequently we notice that they have separate goals. Hence, our research helps in classifying the two terms and what they represent to consumers, and shows the importance of segmentation between platforms for future research on social media. Social networking sites were always related to other people: seeing their lives, keeping in touch, meeting new people, connecting. Whereas social media entities had other purposes more in relation to the self, such as learning, improving one's skills, self-promotion, looking for information, getting news.

4.1.3. Clarifications on Traditional Mass Media vs. Social Media

Literature differentiated between social media and traditional mass media by the fact that on social media, consumers have a new power of expression (Cavazza, 2009). In addition, information on social media can be modified dynamically with immediate feedback, comments and ratings (Scoble, 2007). Our research allowed us to highlight many more differences between traditional media and social media. Differences include how social media represents greater accessibility to people, instantaneous communication, opportunities of self-presentation, and an immensity of information made readily accessible and never limited to selected topics like in newspapers. Thus, we add specific characteristics of the phenomenon of social media to help marketers better understand it.

4.2. Concerning the Goals, Feelings and Behaviors Associated with Social Media

4.2.1. Clarifications on Goals of Using Social Media

Literature concerning motivations for using social media was limited as there was a strong focus on goals of using social networking sites, especially Facebook. Through our lengthy discussions with consumers of social media, we were able to get thorough new knowledge on motivations to use social media. Goals or motivations arise from basic or deep needs. We were able to identify numerous needs which consumers are motivated to fulfill with their use of specific social media platforms, which represent particular resources.

4.2.1.1. Clarifications on the Goal of Connecting with People

We first address the part of the literature that showed that consumers use social media to fulfill personal goals such as the goal to "connect with network of friends and family" (Baird & Parasnis, 2011). Studies showed that social media was not highly associated with a connection to brands as only 23% of consumers went on social media to "interact with brands" (Baird & Parasnis, 2011). Literature on this topic remained superficial as we did not fully grasp which specific aspects and features of social media make it an important resource for the goal of connecting with people. Our in-depth interviews with consumers themselves allow us to address this topic with more precision. First, we may confirm the fact that consumers do not view social media as a place to connect with brands, but rather as a place to fulfill personal goals such as connecting with family and friends. Indeed, informants never divulged information or will to engage with brands via social media. Instead, during their discourses revolving around the metaphor of connection, they frequently mentioned their use of social media for the fulfillment of personal goals. We newly discovered that the space of social media, mainly Facebook, fulfills consumers' goal to connect with people for two specific reasons. First, consumers are able to increase their amounts of connections thanks to the space of Facebook. They mentioned their ability to connect and reunite with old friends, and have a greater potential diversity in their relationships. Also, the space of Facebook being favorable to the exposure of personal details and information, consumers mentioned their opportunity to deepen their connections with people through the platform, and increasingly stay up-to-date with the lives of their acquaintances. Moreover, we discovered that the fast pace of social media contributes to the building of connections. Consumers perceive that the rapidity and the instantaneity of social media give them the chance to make friends in an accelerated fashion. Interactions with others are instantaneous and thus, keep more up-to-date.

Furthermore, previous research showed that the platform of LinkedIn was accessed by consumers with the goals of connecting and contacting professionals in fields of similar interests (Fawley, 2013). However, literature on this topic was lacking in relation to the depth of the usability of LinkedIn, and what it may represent to consumers. Our research enabled us to add new precisions about this topic by exposing the intensity of consumers' need to network with professionals for their careers nowadays. For instance, due to difficult times of unemployment some consumers had to face, the opportunity to stay connected to professionals via social media (especially LinkedIn) was perceived as extremely valuable. Social media represented a treasured resource for this

matter. Informants expressed that LinkedIn assisted them in their job-searching process, and how they don't know what they would have done without it. We identified two crucial points that make LinkedIn an important resource for networking with professionals, according to consumers: the platform allows a great visibility to job hunters, and provides a large reach to interesting career connections.

4.2.1.2. Clarifications on the Goal of Fulfilling Curiosity

Literature showed that consumers use social networking sites to fulfil their curiosity about others (Teichert et al., 2011; Turan et al., 2013). Facebook was described as "fun", "distraction", "mind candy", "gossipy" and "intriguing" (Teichert et al., 2011). The emotional pleasure of seeing people's photos represented an intangible value that motivates consumers' use of social media (Baird & Parasnis, 2011; Erickson, 2012). This thesis provides confirmation of these ideas: informants expressed the will to see other people's lives and fulfill their curiosity about them as they accessed social media. In addition, our research provides new knowledge on highlighted reasons behind consumers' curiosity and the different ways they are able to fulfill it thanks to their access to the space of social media. For instance, some informants described their event of viewing people's lives on Facebook as an activity that is now part of their daily routine in the morning. This activity was mentioned to be very entertaining. Others do it because it allows them to actually become closer to their friends or family members. Finally, parent consumers use Facebook to find out about the lives of their own children. Identifying the profound reasons behind the fulfillment of curiosity allows us to grasp the importance of the social media space for consumers. Some use the space with a superficial purpose of pure entertainment, while others use it for personal and important reasons.

4.2.1.3. Clarifications on the Goal of Getting Value

According to literature, consumers seek value for their engagement in social media. Intangible value may be in the form of advice or "reviews and product rankings" (Baird & Parasnis, 2011; Erickson, 2012). For instance, social media reviewing sites such as Trip Advisor provide value to users for their purchasing processes (Miguéns et al., 2008). Our research may confirm the fact that consumers indeed search for value in their engagement on social media. Informants mentioned using online reviews for travelling and trying new places through the use of the platforms of Trip

Advisor and Yelp. These websites allow intangible value in the form of information, advice, and opinions. Consumers mentioned their appreciation of these sites giving them a thorough view of opinions, and most importantly, explained how they provide them with clarity when making a decision.

Furthermore, literature showed that consumers access social media to get news (Baird & Parasnis, 2011). Knowledge and information represent important resources to consumers (Zaltman & Zaltman; 2008). However, previous research did now show the depth of importance of consumers' need for news and information. Our research enabled us to confirm these ideas, and provide new insights. Indeed, the resource of information and news is perceived as crucial to some consumers as they have expressed a deep need to be aware of what is going on in the world. Through our discussions with informants, we newly found that two specific elements of social media make it the ideal resource for getting news and information. First, consumers perceive social media as a resource for news specifically thanks to its fast pace. Precisely, the platform of Twitter was revealed to be an instantaneous provider of news. When accessing Twitter, consumers felt updated with news immediately. Informants voiced their views of live tweeting, and how the instant flow of information allows them to be immediately informed as the news are taking place. Second, with all the available devices providing access to social media (mobile phones and laptops), platforms such as Twitter may be accessed at any time of the day. Consumers no longer have to wait to get the news; they can get them all the time. To conclude, a new possibility of being informed exists through social media: consumers can now be informed instantly and constantly. For those reasons, informants expressed a sense of urgency and addiction related to their access to Twitter in order to stay informed. In addition, for its great resource of news, the space of Twitter was perceived as essential or vital.

4.2.1.4. Clarifications on the Goals of Self-Presentation and Self-Promotion

Literature showed that individuals increasingly use social media and social networks to promote themselves (Lyons, 2013), and to build personal brands ("The Story of Social Networking: A Timeless Catch-22," 2009). Researchers focused on social networking sites, LinkedIn, and blogs for consumers' self-promotion (Lyons, 2013; Wright, 2013). Our research has allowed us to add new precisions and complexities regarding the concept of self-promotion via social media. We newly discovered the use of other platforms of social media which are importantly associated with great

opportunities of self-promotion. In addition, we identified different motivations of consumers for self-promotion. Importantly, the concept of self-promotion was always associated with a large accessibility to people on social media. Some informants mentioned their will to promote themselves with in mind a career-building perspective: they were looking to promote and showcase their knowledge, ideas, and abilities to attract interesting work connections. Twitter and LinkedIn were associated with this type of self-promotion. Others mentioned the use of Pinterest for self-promotion thanks to its great visual aspect for the advertising of skills or personal business. Informants also voiced their ability to promote ideas or present themselves to the world through the use of podcasts. The space of Pinterest was mentioned to allow consumers to be seen by millions, and podcasts allowed them to be heard by millions. According to consumers, the fact that a lot of people exist and participate on the space of social media, a concept described as "crowd-sourcing", contributes to the development and validation of ideas, making social media a very favorable space for self-promotion. Moreover, consumers may promote an important personal need on the space of social media. For instance, informants mentioned the use of YouTube for the promotion of a need. As it provides great visuals and reach, the platform was described as a worthy place to ask the world a favour, like in the example of a girl who needed a new kidney, stated by informants.

4.2.1.5. Clarifications on the Goal of Individual Empowerment

Literature touched on the topic of consumer empowerment through social media. It was said that individuals get empowered through their larger access to information, and greater ability and efficiency in making choices (Labrecque et al., 2013). Our thesis confirms this aspect of individual enrichment through a larger access to information. We also add supplemental new data concerning this topic as informants importantly associate the social media space and its immensity of information with opportunities to learn new things, discover, and improve their own abilities. Consumers perceive different platforms of social media as valuable for their personal learning and improvement. For instance, YouTube, Pinterest, and Google were mentioned to help consumers in their learning of new skills. Users mentioned that social media allowed them to think outside the box as they discovered new things they wouldn't have thought of doing themselves. Social media, representing pure discovery, is definitely perceived as an exciting space to consumers. They expressed their ability to learn whatever they want at any given time. This resource definitely represents a great positive aspect of empowerment through social media. We importantly note

that social media is fulfilling enrichment goals that individuals probably did not have before, or did not believe it was possible to fulfill before the existence of the space of social media.

According to previous literature, social media is seen as democratic to consumers for giving them the chance to express themselves freely, and can be heard by large numbers of people ("Social Shopping: Reshaping the World of Retail,"). Researchers showed that consumers have a need to express themselves, and they access social networking sites to fulfill this need (Teichert et al., 2011). Literature on this topic remained shallow as we did not fully understand which platforms, besides social networking sites, and features of social media, make it a resource for self-expression. Our study first allows us to confirm that the space of social media definitely eases the ability to voice personal views and opinions. The opportunity of personal expression is cherished by consumers. For instance, they want to be allowed to criticize the government or to discuss religious ideals, and social media is the best space to do this easily. An important factor contributing favorably to the ease and freedom of expression is the anonymity or "shield of the Internet", mentioned by informants. Moreover, we add new interesting knowledge as our results show that different social media platforms represent great agents to fulfill the need of personal expression. For instance, podcasts and Twitter are highly associated with self-expression to a large public. Most interestingly, through consumers' speeches, we understood that social media is perceived as a strong empowering tool for its opportunity of self-expression. Informants revealed dark images of times before social media, during which individuals were restricted from communicating opinions. Consumer citations deeply revealed how freedom of expression through the space of social media makes them feel highly empowered by giving them the chance to believe in their own aspirations. However, informants feel ambivalent towards this new democratic power given to everybody: they feel happy and excited for the future, but also anxious. Social media represents a force which needs to be well-monitored. Informants voiced how openness of expression must be done responsibly or it may lead to trouble like the example of political scandals that were released on the platform of Wiki Leaks.

4.2.2. Clarifications on Feelings Associated with Social Media

Literature on the topic of consumers' feelings mostly focused on feelings in relation to social networking sites ("The Story of Social Networking: A Timeless Catch-22," 2009; Teichert et al.,

2011). Thus, a holistic view of feelings experienced within social media platforms was missing. Our research allows us to add new knowledge concerning feelings associated with social media.

4.2.2.1. Clarifications on Feelings in Relation to Connection

Literature presented that consumers feel powerful when they connect with others on social networking sites (Teichert et al., 2011). On social networks, consumers reported feelings of praise, admiration, appreciation, and love ("The Story of Social Networking: A Timeless Catch-22," 2009). Our research provides confirmation on these pieces of information. Our discussions with informants allowed us to discover new feelings associated with connecting with people via Facebook specifically. For instance, consumers expressed the feelings of warmth to the heart, great happiness, and joy when they got the chance to reunite with old friends thanks to the space of Facebook. Mainly, we specify the fact that consumers expressed these emotions of joy because they perceived that the distance between them and their friends was reduced, and they were now able to keep their friendships forever thanks to social media. We also found that consumers felt excitement due to the fact that social media increased their opportunities to reach diverse potential connections. These ideas represent new knowledge for literature.

We also add new insights from the fact that besides Facebook, LinkedIn also represents a platform that allows feelings of power to consumers. Informants expressed their feelings of pride and increased self-confidence as job hunters contacted them via LinkedIn. As a result, they felt more self-assured about their work image.

Furthermore, previous literature showed feelings of anxiety and loneliness reported from users on social networks (Teichert et al., 2011). Our research may confirm these feelings of anxiety and loneliness. Thanks to our in-depth interviews, we may add the following new knowledge related to this topic. Informants revealed worry, concern, and anxiety for their growing self-exposure on the Internet due to their increased amount of connections built through social media. In addition, informants mentioned how connecting on social media gave them the feeling of replacing or taking over their real-life relationships, which made them feel lonely. They voiced concern and discontent about the potential result of losing human touch because of the growing use of social media. We may also specify that these negative feelings were highly due to the growing accessibility of social media by cellphones.

4.2.2.2. Clarifications on Feelings of Relaxation and Anxiety

Literature presented that social networking sites were highly associated with relaxing feelings. Users apparently experience "a warm, energizing escape" while engaging in social networks, and view them as a "place to gather and relax, listen and laugh" ("The Story of Social Networking: A Timeless Catch-22," 2009). However, our research comes to show the following contradictions related to this topic. Informants did not express feelings of relaxation when using social networking sites. Rather, negative feelings emerged with the use of Facebook and the phone application Grindr. The act of perceiving other people's lives as productive on social media gave users undesirable feelings of annoyance. But mostly, consumers perceived that they were wasting their time as they expressed feeling deeply unproductive compared to others' productiveness on the platform. We specify that consumers constantly felt the need to control their use of the social media platforms, an activity that is evidently more intense than relaxing. Such negative feelings yielded intense reactions from consumers as they expressed their desire to leave the social mediums for good. The word "liberating" was mentioned as informants described their imagined exit from the mediums.

Furthermore, literature also showed that social networking sites users have feelings of anxiety and vulnerability to people's judgments. Due to this, users re-evaluate and sometimes refrain from action ("The Story of Social Networking: A Timeless Catch-22," 2009). Literature previously stated that individuals wish to control the perceptions and impressions that other people have of them (Goffman, 1959). Our study confirms this knowledge as all our informants expressed directly or indirectly worries and concerns in relation to their image and their privacy on social media. Most importantly, we discovered that these worries specifically emerge from a sense of lacking control over their self-image and privacy. Our research reveals interesting new insights on such controlling perceptions or actions: consumers importantly try to exert control on social media. These controlling behaviors originate from the perceived fear and risk that social media entails to their privacy and image. The metaphor of control involves decision-making on the part of consumers. When deciding to share in social media, consumers must make decisions. Informants expressed challenge in choosing what to share or post, because they felt confused as to remain private or be more public on social media. This balance between privacy and openness was newly revealed to give consumers a lot of thought, and sometimes gave them feelings of anxiety because they felt that they lacked control over it. Hence, some made decisions to remain extremely private by

posting very little. Most interestingly, our research enabled us to realize that social media represents a deep risk to one's privacy. In addition, we were able to identity different very personal reasons for the refrainment of action on social media, such as not wanting to offend others with personal views, or not wishing to share things with specific persons from someone's past.

4.2.3. Clarifications on Behaviors Associated with Social Media

Information concerning consumer behaviors associated with social media from literature was in the form of facts rather than descriptions. As a result, it lacked in depth. Our exhaustive interviews with consumers allowed us to take existing knowledge further and identify new key ideas related to consumer behavior on social media.

4.2.3.1. Clarifications on Behaviors Involving Multi-Tasking

According to literature, consumers' experiences with social media entail multi-tasking behaviors such as communicating through devices while watching television, or social TV ("Social Television: Ways To Engage," 2012), and the act of voting live on Twitter (Armano, 2011). In addition, it was stated that individuals use many different mediums at once (Sheth & Solomon, 2014). Our research enabled us to add new knowledge and insight regarding the multi-tasking aspect of social media. As social media is now omnipresent in consumers' lives, we discovered that its ubiquitous existence involves many new behaviors from the part of consumers. We were able to grasp social media's important association to multi-tasking when a consumer described the opposite of social media as a monk doing the sole task of meditation. Interestingly, the informant felt that his omnipresent connection to social media was taking away from his everyday activities as he had to manage many applications all at once (like receiving messages on WhatsApp, getting push notifications from Facebook, and having applications running on the phone). Indeed, consumers juggle these online activities while doing their real life activities such as working, or having dinner with family. With the new ever-presence of social media, consumers definitely have to learn to manage different things all at once which makes them feel invaded, distracted, overwhelmed, and anxious as their phones keep ringing with social media messages or notifications. Consumers also reported becoming attached, addicted, and dependent on their mobile phones. Our study enabled us to identify this new perspective of the omnipresence of social media which is adding multi-

tasking behaviors from the part of consumers. The topic of social media's omnipresence in consumers' lives is so new that it is definitely worthy of further research.

4.2.3.2. Clarifications on Behaviors Related to Learning Social Media

Literature reported that users may learn social media applications fairly easily (Erickson, 2012). However, to our knowledge, research has not been done on the topic of learning to use social media and learning new social media applications or platforms as they emerge. With our in-depth research, we may add many new insights regarding the learning behavior of social media. Firstly, we may contradict the information from the literature as none of our informants expressed ease in their learning process of social media applications and platforms. Rather, informants communicated difficulty, unease, and confusion related to their learning process. Learning social media was mentioned to necessitate a large amount of mental effort from consumers. Most frequently, age was associated with a challenge in learning. In addition, consumers expressed challenge in learning for different reasons. Like previous literature stated, social media can be overwhelming because of the need to constantly learn things to stay up-to-date (Samuel, 2011). Indeed, in our study, the feeling of overwhelm was mentioned in regards to the large amount of learning required to use a platform like Pinterest, which was perceived as not intuitive by some. Moreover, consumers revealed unease when having to browse many websites for an activity such as shopping, and thus expressed their desire to limit their activity on social media. Additionally, our study shows that social media learning requires interest. Some consumers expressed will and curiosity in learning and staying up-to-date with new platforms of social media, while others voiced a strong lack of interest. Interest in learning was highly personal to users. Some platforms or tools such as Pinterest, Twitter, and the use of hashtags, did not yield interest because consumers did not see a purpose in using them. Finally, age was mentioned to be perhaps adding to the lack of interest of some.

Furthermore, researchers revealed that social media comprises an immensity of data, generated at a fast pace which consumers perceive with varying degrees of accuracy (Marr, 2014). In confirmation with literature, our research showed that the immensity of information present on social media makes it difficult to search for one piece of information, and consumers reported feeling overwhelmed. However, our research allowed us to additionally discover the following two other reasons behind the difficulty to find information on social media. First, consumers expressed

a negative perception and outcome of user-generated content. According to them, social media, being contributed information from large numbers of people, turns into large volumes of worthless information, which adds to their challenge of finding valuable data. Second, users who described themselves as being "not technology-savvy" expressed how searching for information on the Internet required from them a lot of effort and time. Their reactions included quickly giving up. Furthermore, there was an apparent unease to learning social media in relation to its fast speed of evolution and constant variation. Importantly, we discovered that social media's fast pace makes consumers lack control. Consumers expressed their experience involving staying up-to-date with social media platforms, while learning to use social media new applications as they get released. We noticed how this involvement in learning represented a challenge. The phenomenon of social media, being so unpredictable, evolving rapidly, and involving constant learning behaviors, gave consumers a sense of lacking control. The notions of speed and control combined are new and interesting for further research.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

5.1. Conclusion and Research Contributions

The aim of this study was to uncover and analyze consumers' deep perceptions and representations of social media. To do so, we first attempted to better grasp the concept of social media and consumers' experience with it in their lives from the existing literature. We then conducted in-depth interviews with consumers of social media which allowed us to analyze their profound and personal perceptions and experiences with the phenomenon. Finally, we were in position to relate our findings to the data found in previous literature with clarifications and precisions.

We selected a qualitative research method known as the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (Zaltman, 1998) by which we conducted in-depth interviews with consumers of social media. With the use of imagery, our informants expressed their deep feelings and thoughts about their personal experiences with social media. We were able to highlight emerging metaphors of speech which helped us to shape the minds of consumers in relation to the topic of study. Additionally, we identified embodied geographical dimensions which characterize consumers' life with social media: the dimensions of space, time, and speed of social media. Once combined, the metaphors and the geographical dimensions gave rise to new permutations of the experience of an individual with social media which yielded the most complexity and depth in meaning. We presented our results in a structural manner of the combined metaphors and geographical themes.

This thesis came in handy to fulfill a first crucial step which had been omitted in past research on social media: we still did not grasp what really mattered to consumers when considering social media, and we did not have a holistic view and understanding of their perceptions. With this research, we were able to achieve our objective which consisted of a full exploration of the topic of social media. We obtained a thorough and deep understanding of the consumer's personal experience with social media in their life. Our emergent metaphors and embodied geographical themes let us grasp what matters to individuals in terms of the completeness of the phenomenon

of social media. We concluded with a more rounded vision of what social media represents in consumers' lives.

5.2. Future Research Directions and Managerial Recommendations

This exploratory research has opened many new directions for future research. Mainly, we understand that social media represents a world that, once penetrated by users, involves geographical dimensions that are equally present in the offline world: space, time, and speed. Knowing this, researchers may advance studies about specific social media platforms combined with the dimensions of space, time, and speed, to enhance precision about consumers' experiences with social media.

The space, time, and speed of social media seen through the lens of the metaphor of connection allowed us to discover insights that are enriching for further research. First, we note that the space and rapid speed of social media are favorable to creating and building connections. In addition, the social media space is one that deepens the kinds of connections thanks to its readily available high exposure of information. Consumers highly associated building connections on social media to their smartphones. The fact that the growing use of smartphones to access social media importantly contributes to the building of connections is an interesting area for further research, as it can help us get additional specific knowledge about mobile phones and the purpose of connecting with others. Mobile phone firms and social media application managers can greatly benefit from research on this topic. We may recommend phone applications creators to build new applications targeted towards connecting with people, for example. However, the existing paradox of social media representing disconnection to consumers gave an array of new feelings to consumers, such as annoyance and anxiety related to social media. Our recommendations to managers of phone companies include adapting applications to create a stronger separation between the online and offline worlds of consumers. For instance, managers may implement strategies of silencing phones according to the location of the consumer, so that these feel less distracted and bothered. As we have found the variable of the smartphone to be one of the important causes of the paradox of feelings of connection and loneliness, we may direct future research to analyze specific settings in which individuals find themselves using social media applications such as Facebook or Instagram while being out with their friends. Such research may enlighten us in relation to the feelings of active consumers of social media, and those of rather

passive users, in the same setting. In addition, as we understood that individuals are preoccupied or disturbed by the fact that their peers are using social media while being out with them, we may recommend future research to separate variables in relation to the activities implemented on social media while being out such as posting pictures, chatting on Facebook, or reading on Twitter. Studying and analyzing the different possible activities taking place in the settings of consumers can allow a deeper understanding of consumers' feelings and behaviors. For instance, taking a picture and posting it while being out friends or "checking in" a certain location may involve different actions from the part of consumers, and may impact their thoughts and behaviors in specific ways. It would be beneficial to further investigate whether different actions help to build a bond of connection between friends, or do they rather increase feelings of loneliness.

Moreover, findings suggested that certain social media platforms like blogs were perceived as unrewarding activities in relation to consumers' goals of connecting with people because of their large amount of time and effort required to create. To complement this knowledge, further research on the level of perceived rewarding outcomes from other social media platforms would be enriching. As we now understand some apparent purposes and outcomes of blogs according to some users of social media, we recommend academic researchers to further investigate this aspect on a larger scale of consumers. As we confirm these findings on a larger scale, we will be in position to recommend managers of online boards to implement new strategies such as making blogging platforms increasingly user-friendly, easier to manage, and less time-consuming.

Furthermore, the space, time, and speed of social media seen through the lens of the metaphor of control yielded results from different perspectives which can be great potential areas for future academic research, and can benefit management. First, we note that age and interest are factors which impact the learning and keeping up with social media. These specific notions are definitely worthy of further research as they can enrich organizations about the different usage and learning abilities of consumers. In addition, findings suggested that the fast pace of social media detracts consumers from keeping up with its evolution. Social media companies may compute surveys to further understand how younger versus older consumers react to new platforms of social media. In this way, they could learn ways to adapt applications to the age and interest of the consumer, and make them more intuitive according to segmented age groups. These implementations would be extremely beneficial as we would avoid negative reactions of users such as leaving a social media platform because of a simple lack of understanding, like we encountered in this research.

Results also showed that the space of social media was represented by an immensity of information which caused trouble and anxiety to users as they were searching for pieces of information. Managers can benefit from this knowledge and attempt to build their websites in a more concise manner to avoid creating anxiety to users which may deviate from their goals to sell or to attract consumers.

An additional important finding includes the fact that all consumers sense the need to exert control on the space of social media. While some mentioned an ability to control situations with acquired discipline and effort, others reported feeling helpless. These personal disciplines created by consumers themselves are definitely interesting to further investigate in academic research with the use of surveys on a larger population. In addition, social media companies can highly benefit from understanding that social media represents a world that consumers penetrate, and in which they want to feel happy and satisfied. Control is something that consumers highly value in their everyday life experiences including their experience into the world of social media. Whenever individuals may feel a lack of control, negative feelings will emerge. Thus, we may recommend firms of all areas to help consumers feel more in control during their activity on social media. We recommend allowing more practical and facilitated learning of privacy settings on social media can make consumers feel more in control, less worried about their privacy, and thus feel more comfortable and at ease during their online experiences on social networks for example. Social media was also represented as a temptation which affects consumers' physical time and their perception of time. Managers can react upon this idea and help consumers feel more in control of their time spent on social media. For instance, a social media clock may be implemented for consumers to keep track of their time spent on platforms, something they would evidently value. Following our research, it would be beneficial to deepen the analysis of the metaphor of control in academic studies by segmenting specific factors which impact the control perceptions of consumers of social media. Such factors include privacy settings on websites, personal image online, and the immensity of data found on social media. Each of these elements is complex on its own as it involves distinct consumer reactions.

Finally, the metaphor of resource merged with the dimensions of space, time, and speed of social media allowed us to highlight numerous positive consumer perceptions that are worthy of future research and consideration. First, we note that the social media space, increasingly accessed by smartphones, is perceived as a resource in consumers' everyday life. Hence, mobile phones

represent new crucial tools in consumers' daily life for routine and organization. Understanding this novice topic in more depth as it grows is important for marketers. It would be enriching to better understand the involvement and immersion of social media in consumers' everyday lives. Managers of phone companies could greatly benefit from this knowledge. We may recommend managers to build applications with customized adaptation to the routine life of consumers. For instance, as we understood how checking phones is the first activity of consumers as they wake up in the morning, we may advise phone companies to adapt applications to the wishes of consumers. For example, phones may develop morning applications which show consumers everything they need to know in a quick and convenient fashion.

Moreover, social media, being perceived as a space for learning, is an interesting area for further research that could benefit organizations. Consumers value their opportunity to learn new things and discover on social media. Knowing this, social media firms can make their platforms more favorable spaces for learning. For instance, advertisements focused on opportunities to learn and discover new things could be posted on social media websites. Retail companies can also involve learning resources in their strategies of reaching consumers. For example, they may offer consumers tips and advice with clothing.

Furthermore, we noted an important link between the metaphors of resource and connection: thanks to the massive reach of people, the social media space was perceived as the perfect place to grasp important business contacts and promote personal ideas. These opportunities were greatly valued by consumers. As a result, it is recommended for managers to focus on these elements to attract and engage consumers on their online spaces. For instance, they may ease and facilitate the reach to large numbers of people on websites.

Another interesting finding to further investigate included the positive perceptions of social media as a force for good and for change in human kind. For instance, further research on measurements of the contributions of different platforms for positive change in human kind could be enriching for social media organizations.

Finally, social media was shown to have great time saving qualities thanks to its convenience and its fast pace. Companies can insure that their websites are quick and efficient to continue to reduce waiting times for consumers, as it is valued.

5.3. Limits

Exploratory research is an "investigation into a problem" (Businessdictionary.com). As this thesis has explored the phenomenon of social media in its totality, we may have encountered some limitations. While we have discovered important insights from consumers regarding the topic of social media, some findings, due to the limited number of respondents, may not be sufficient for managers to establish decisive choices. As we have discovered the "why", "how", and "when" about social media and its users, exploratory research does not always allow to answer fuller scale issues such as "how often" or "how many" (Reddy & Acharyulu, 2009). Nonetheless, exploratory research remains extremely useful in identifying specific variables and key problems in relation to a topic. In addition, such a study allows researchers to discover the right ways and methods for further studies on the topic at hand ("Research Methods: Some Notes,").

Moreover, limitations of qualitative research studies may include researcher bias. The researcher's personality, personal and cultural background, views, and analysis of the data represent factors that may influence the body of the research (Johnson, 1997). Other limits of this research include the sample size of ten participants. While we were able to grasp a complete array of knowledge about social media, we may still wonder if interviewing a greater number of participants could have yielded additional information. As well, the cultural aspect of the study may represent a limit. We did not notice cultural differences between the participants who lived in Montreal, and the ones who lived in Boston, two cities in close proximity of each other. While we have attempted to vary the base of informants for this study as much as possible, we may wonder if participants from another continent would have yielded the same results. Nonetheless, we believe that the topic of research of social media is universal, and can easily be extrapolated for further research in new countries.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Recruitment Message

Hello,

I'm looking for participants for a study for my Masters' thesis at HEC Montreal. I would like to give you the description of the study and if you are interested it would be a great pleasure to have you as a participant. Here is the description:

A two hour interview with me about the topic of Social Media, with a monetary compensation of $30.

There is a small task to do **before** the interview:

1. Collect 8-10 images of what Social Media represents to you

(Attention: Please note that I am looking for images that represent your perceptions of the concept of Social Media. Please do not bring images of logos or advertisements.)

2. Print the images and bring the hard copies to our interview

3. Email me the sources of your images

Please let me know if this is clear and if you have any questions.

If you wish to participate, please let me know what day and time would be best for you.

Thank you,

Lana Jurdak

Student M.Sc. Marketing, HEC Montreal

Appendix 2 Discussion Guide

Before the interview, the participant is asked to bring 10 images that represent social media to him/her.

Introduction

- Sit in room

- Talk a little bit

- Sign two Consent Forms + Make the participant sign one Consent Form

- Place the two recorders near the participant

- Thanks for coming!

- Description of the research objective:

The objective of this research is to understand your perception of social media. Our interview will remain confidential, your name and other data will not be used in any way for the analysis. You will not be identified by your first name, we will use a pseudonym. The interview will last about two hours and will take place in nine stages.

There is no right or wrong answers and all of your comments will be relevant

for our study. If necessary, we may stop the interview at any time. You have the right not

to answer a question or to withdraw from the study without any negative consequences. Your participation should be fun and we will do everything to achieve it. Do you have any questions? If not, we may begin.

Preliminary step: Internet Consumption

Internet activity:

- How long have you been using the Internet?

- How many hours a day do you spend online?

- In what setting do you use the Internet? (work, leisure, etc.).

- What is the importance of the Internet for you?

- On which sites, blogs, forums or online communities are you present?

- What do you do on this website (s)?

- How often do you visit it?

- What is the importance of this site for you?

- How do you communicate with your friends and family?

- With how many people do you communicate regularly? With who do you communicate the most?

- Can you tell me a little bit about your media consumption? (Do you watch television, listen to radio, read magazines, newspapers?)

Step 1: Storytelling

The respondent must describe the content of each image with the story behind it and by making a link with the theme of the study Social Media.

- Please present to me one by one the images that you brought.

Take a picture of each image

- Why did you choose this image to illustrate the concept of Social Media?

- What title would you give to this image? Why?

Recovery:

When participant speaks of a concept, ask:

- What is the main reason that allowed you to choose this photo?
- Can you tell me more about this factor (element, aspect, concept)?
- Can you describe this factor? (if 2,compare)
- What do you think about this?
- What are your thoughts on this?
- What is your perception about this?
- How do you feel about this?
- Tell me about the colors used?
- (If the presence of a person) => In your opinion, what role has that person?

- Note all the concepts discussed and titles for future use.

Recovery issues:

Step 2: Missed Images

It may be that a respondent wanted to find a certain image, but couldn't find it, or that he

failed to find the perfect image to represent the concept. So we will

ask him to describe the images he saw but has not chosen by trying to understand

why they did not correspond to an image related to the topic being studied. Or, we will

ask him to describe or draw what he hoped would find but could not get.

- During your image search, did you find all the images you were looking for?

- If you haven't, please describe the image (s) that you would have liked to find, or you may draw it if you like.

Recovery issues:

- *What would the perfect image to illustrate the concept of social media?*

- *What would be its title?*

- *What are the main colors? (Use only if the informant really need help because*

not very relevant)

- *What is the main reason that makes you think of this image?*

- *Can you tell me more about this factor (element, aspect, concept)?*

- *Can you describe this factor? (if 2,compare)*

- *What do you think about this?*

- *What are your thoughts on this?*

- *What is your perception about this?*

- *How do you feel about this?*

- *Tell me about the colors used?*

- *(If the presence of a person) => In your opinion, what role has that person?*

Step 3: Sorting Task

Please take all your images and rank (classify) them into groups.

Look at how he proceeds.

- What are the similarities between the groups?

Recovery issue:

What are the differences between the groups?

Step 4: Construct Elicitation

I randomly select 2 groups of images that were created.

Please compare these two groups:

- In what way are the images of the two groups similar?

- In what way are the images of the two groups different?

Repeat with another pair of groups. Repeat until all pairs are done.

Ex:

3 groups – 3 pairs: 1&2, 2&3, 1&3

4 groups – 6 pairs: 1&2, 1&3, 1&4, 2&3, 2&4, 3&4

- Note all the concepts discussed and the titles and call them up later

Step 5: Representative Image

Please identify the image that best represents the concept of Social Media (or images (maximum 3)).

- Why do you think this picture is the most representative of the theme of social media?

- How is this image different from the others? And why?

If the respondent is not able to identify one important image, I can pick an image that we could analyze with more depth (choice of the researcher).

- Note all the concepts discussed and the titles and call them up later

- *What is the main reason that makes you think of this image?*

    - *Can you tell me more about this factor (element, aspect, concept)?*

    - *Can you describe this factor? (if 2,compare)*

    - *What do you think about this?*

    - *What are your thoughts on this?*

    - *What is your perception about this?*

    - *How do you feel about this?*

    - *Tell me about the colors used?*

    - *(If the presence of a person) => In your opinion, what role has that person?*

Step 6: Opposite Image

Please describe an image you can think of that represents the opposite of Social Media. You can describe it or draw it if you like.

What is the main reason that makes you think of this image?

- *Can you tell me more about this factor (element, aspect, concept)?*

- *Can you describe this factor? (if 2,compare)*

- *What do you think about this?*

- *What are your thoughts on this?*

- *What is your perception about this?*

- *How do you feel about this?*

- *Tell me about the colors used?*

- *(If the presence of a person) => In your opinion, what role has that person?*

Step 7: Sensory Images

I will now give you a series of questions to describe the concept of Social Media by using your senses and feelings.

Taste

- If Social Media had a taste, what would it be? o Why?

Smell

- If Social Media was a smell, what would it be? o Why?

Touch

- If Social Media had a texture, what would it be? o Why?

- If Social Media was a season, what would it be? o Why?

Hearing

- If Social Media was a song, what would it be? o Why?

Feelings

If Social Media was a temperature, what would it be? o Why?

- If Social Media was a time of day, what would it be? o Why?

- If Social Media was a person, who would it be? o Why?

- If Social Media was a city, what would it be? o Why?

Each justification must be made using a qualifying term (example: "Because it is Sweet ")

Step 8: The Summary Image

Hand him the carton, glue, scissors.

Please use your images to make a collage that represents Social Media. You may cut your images and play with them however you like. Let me know when you're done.

After the collage is done:

Please imagine I am a new person coming into this interview at this moment. Tell me the story behind your collage.

The story brings together all of his thoughts on the subject (see the angle, the order, image size) and can help identify the importance of different concepts.

Closing the interview

Is there anything else you would like to mention to me about how you feel about Social Media?

Image Selection

Please tell me a little bit about your process of collecting the images?

- When did you collect them?

- How much time did it take you?

- Did you use the internet, magazines, books, etc?

Final Step: Consumer Information

I would like you to tell me a little bit about yourself, your family, your friends:

- How old are you?

- What is your profession?

- How long have you been living in Montreal / Boston?

- Do you live with your family?

- Do you have your own laptop? Do you carry it around?

Thank you very much for participating in this research. Your help is much appreciated.

Give the $30.

Give him the Consent Form that I signed.

If you wish, you may have access to the written transcript of this interview. For this, please email me.

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